

Design Of Surabaya T-Shirt Merchandise As A Medium For Promotion And Introduction Of Historical Sites In The City Of Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

Surabaya is a major city in Indonesia that holds significant historical importance in the struggle for independence, particularly the events of November 10, 1945, which are commemorated as Heroes' Day. The stories, figures, and historical sites in Surabaya represent valuable heritage that needs to be introduced to the younger generation. However, young people's interest in local history tends to decline because conventional historical presentation is often perceived as less engaging. At the same time, the younger generation is closely connected to visual culture and fashion as a means of self-expression. This study aims to design Surabaya historical-site-themed T-shirt merchandise as a communicative educational and promotional medium for young adults. Specifically, the study identifies representative historical sites in Surabaya, translates their historical and visual characteristics into T-shirt designs, develops supporting merchandise and digital media, and evaluates the design through stakeholder and target-audience feedback. Using the Design Thinking method, the study produced five T-shirt designs based on the Heroes Monument, Tunjungan Street, Hotel Majapahit, the Old Town, and the Red Bridge. The results show that minimalist architectural line-art, bold typography, limited historical color accents, short descriptions, coordinates, and QR-code-linked Instagram content can connect historical information with a contemporary fashion format. Stakeholder and user testing indicated that the designs were historically recognizable and visually relevant, although several technical revisions were needed in coordinate placement, front-back layout consistency, and line thickness. Therefore, Surabaya historical-themed T-shirt merchandise can function as an alternative medium for historical education, local identity promotion, and heritage-based creative products.

Keywords: Promotional Media, Educational Media, Merchandise, Historical Site, Surabaya City.

INTRODUCTION

Surabaya is known as the City of Heroes, with a significant role in the history of the nation's struggle, particularly the events of November 10, 1945 (Anshori & Kusrianto, 2011). The city possesses numerous stories, figures, and historical sites that should be passed on to the younger generation. However, young people's interest in and understanding of local history tend to decline due to presentation methods that are

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considered less engaging, as reflected in the low number of visits to museums and historical sites. This information is based on the results of an interview with Herry Purwadi, S.Sn., Head of the Cultural Division of the Department of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Tourism of Surabaya City Government, known as DISBUDPORAPAR (Interview, June 2, 2025). At the same time, cultural tourism and souvenir studies show that heritage experiences can be extended through creative products that carry place-based meanings (Richards, 2018; Swanson & Timothy, 2012).

Several previous studies have explored the use of creative media to promote historical awareness and local heritage. Hapsari and Patria (2024) designed the Puzzle Horizon Blocks Surabaya Heritage as an educational wooden puzzle to introduce historical buildings in Surabaya to children. Kurniawan (2022) developed a graphic novel about the origins of Surabaya to preserve and communicate local history to teenagers. In the field of fashion-based promotion, Wicaksono (2022) designed T-shirts as a promotional medium for tourism destinations in Ngawi Regency, while Khairullah (2025) utilized merchandise, including T-shirts, to promote the Mpu Tantular State Museum in Sidoarjo Regency. These studies demonstrate that creative media can effectively support educational and promotional objectives related to history and tourism. This is also consistent with cultural tourism research, which emphasizes the growing connection between tangible heritage, intangible meaning, creative experience, and heritage-based consumption (Richards, 2018).

This condition creates an opportunity to utilize creative media, such as T-shirts, as a means of historical education and promotion of local identity. Heritage-based creative products can function not only as commercial items but also as media that communicate cultural memory, place identity, and historical meaning (Richards, 2018; Swanson & Timothy, 2012). However, despite the existence of various educational and promotional media, T-shirt products specifically designed to introduce the historical sites and heritage of Surabaya remain limited and have not been utilized optimally (Persada et al., 2021). Furthermore, previous studies have focused on different media, audiences, or geographical contexts, leaving a gap in the development of fashion-based educational media that specifically communicates Surabaya's historical heritage to young adults.

Therefore, this study aims to design Surabaya historical-site-themed T-shirt merchandise as a communicative educational and promotional medium for young adults. The specific objectives are: (1) to identify representative historical sites in Surabaya that can be used as visual references; (2) to translate the historical meanings and visual characteristics of those sites into T-shirt designs; (3) to develop supporting merchandise and digital media that extend the educational function of the T-shirts; and (4) to evaluate the design results through stakeholder and target-audience feedback.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

History

History in this design is understood as knowledge and narrative about past events that provide meaning for the present. In the context of visual communication, historical content is not treated only as chronological information, but as cultural material that can be translated into communicative visual forms. Therefore, the historical theme of Surabaya is used as the basis for selecting visual objects, developing illustration styles, and composing educational information on the T-shirt merchandise.

Historical Sites

Historical places refer to locations where historical events occurred in the past, while historical sites are places where remnants of past human activities are found, related to economic, political, social, and cultural aspects (Warsito, 2012). According to The Burra Charter, preservation is carried out on places that possess cultural significance, including aesthetic, historical, scientific, or social value for past, present, and future generations (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). In the Indonesian regulatory context, cultural heritage includes material cultural heritage in the form of objects, buildings, structures, sites, and areas that need to be preserved because of their important value for history, science, education, religion, and culture (Republic of Indonesia, 2010).

Surabaya Heritage City

Surabaya, known as the City of Heroes, has a long history and a wide range of historical heritage related to colonial history, urban development, and the struggle for independence (Anshori & Kusrianto, 2011). Today, traces of this history can be seen in old buildings, urban corridors, monuments, and public landmarks that remain part of the city's identity. Several buildings or locations that serve as references for this design include the Tunjungan Street corridor and Hotel Majapahit, as well as the Old Town area, the Red Bridge, and the Heroes Monument. These places were selected because they combine architectural visibility, public familiarity, and relevance to Surabaya's historical narratives.

Color

Color plays an important role in creating impressions and certain psychological effects. Color can not only be observed visually but also influences behavior, aesthetic judgment, as well as preferences or aversions toward an object. Thus, color functions as a visual element that can affect a person's perception and response. In general, warm colors are associated with joy and positive impressions, while cool colors are linked to calmness. This understanding can be applied in T-shirt design by selecting appropriate colors to create a cohesive design and to represent the intended meaning and visual identity.

Typography

According to Rustan (2011), typography is the discipline that specifically studies letters. Typography is one of the languages in graphic design that does not stand independently; it is closely related to other fields such as communication, technology, psychology, and others. Typography is the art of selecting and arranging type by organizing its distribution within available spaces to create a particular impression, thereby helping readers achieve maximum reading comfort.

Layout

In this design, layout functions as one of the most important elements in determining visual efficiency so that information can be understood as easily as possible. In printing, it also determines the placement of visual elements or messages. According to Ambrose and Harris (2005), layout is the arrangement of frames or panels between images that are organized to connect with one another. It also involves creating design elements in relation to the space or field in which they exist, ensuring harmony with the overall visual appearance in terms of aesthetics. The function of layout is to present visual and textual elements in an organized manner, enabling readers to understand them easily.

Previous Studies

The first study, titled *Design of Puzzle Horizon Blocks Surabaya Heritage* by Hapsari and Patria (2024), utilized an educational game in the form of wooden puzzles to introduce historical buildings in Surabaya to children aged 6–8 years. This design aimed to serve as an alternative medium for historical education using a qualitative research method through primary and secondary data collection. The data analysis technique used was 5W+1H. The similarity with this study lies in the object of introducing Surabaya's history, while the difference is found in the media and target audience.

The second study, conducted by Kurniawan (2022) and titled *Design of a Graphic Novel Book on the Origins of Surabaya*, used a graphic novel as the medium, targeting teenagers aged 15–20 years as an effort to introduce and preserve local history. Data collection methods included primary and secondary data, with analysis techniques involving data reduction, presentation, and verification. The similarity lies in the subject of Surabaya's history, while the difference is in the media and data analysis techniques.

The third study by Wicaksono (2022), titled *T-Shirt Design as a Promotional Medium for Tourist Destinations in Ngawi Regency*, utilized T-shirts as a medium for tourism promotion. This study aimed to introduce tourist destinations to the public through fashion media, using primary and secondary data collection methods and USP analysis techniques. The similarity lies in the use of T-shirts as a promotional medium, while the difference is in the target audience and data analysis techniques.

The fourth study by Khairullah (2025), titled *Merchandise Design as a Promotional Tool for the Mpu Tantular State Museum in Sidoarjo Regency*, aimed to promote the museum to students aged 12–18 years through various types of merchandise, including T-shirts. The method used was Design Thinking with SWOT analysis techniques. The similarity lies in the use of T-shirts as a promotional medium, while the difference is in the target audience and data analysis techniques.

Overall, these four studies are relevant to the design of Surabaya historical-themed T-shirts, as they all utilize creative media as a means of promoting and educating about history or tourism. The differences lie in the choice of media, target audience, and analytical approaches used.

According to Rösch et al. (2023), Design Thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that combines designers' sensitivity with methods and processes to solve complex problems. This process involves empathizing with users, defining problems, generating ideas, developing prototypes, and conducting tests. The approach emphasizes the importance of understanding users and their contexts, as well as rapid iteration to refine ideas based on feedback. This method emphasizes a deep understanding of users, context, and the development of ideas based on feedback. The Design Thinking process consists of five main stages. The empathize stage is conducted to understand user needs through qualitative approaches such as interviews, observations, and literature studies. The define stage focuses on processing and formulating problems based on the collected data, using the 5W+1H analysis technique. Next, the ideate stage aims to generate creative ideas and solutions aligned with the identified problems, leading to the formation of a design concept. The prototype stage involves transforming the concept into a visual form, such as mockups or design models. Finally, the testing stage aims to evaluate the prototype with users in order to obtain feedback and refine the design so that it meets user needs.

The research data consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained directly through observation, interviews, and questionnaires, which are relevant to qualitative data collection procedures in design-oriented research (Sugiyono, 2013). Field observations were conducted at several historical locations in Surabaya, such as the Tunjungan Street area, the Old Town, and the Heroes Monument. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Surabaya City Government, specifically the Head of the Cultural Division of the Department of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Tourism of Surabaya, in order to obtain information to the design. After completing the interview and observation stages, it is necessary to conduct a pre-survey with the intended audience, namely the younger generation. The purpose of this pre-survey is to obtain direct data from the target audience, which will serve as the foundation for the design process, ranging from the overall theme and concept to the visual and technical aspects of the media. The questionnaire is administered through Google Forms and distributed to relevant members of the target audience. A minimum of 50 respondents is established as the benchmark to ensure a wider variety of responses. The data collected through the questionnaire include demographic information, questions related

to historical topics, media preferences, design preferences, as well as feedback and suggestions.

Secondary data are obtained indirectly through various supporting sources. These include online sources such as the internet and Pinterest, as well as literature studies consisting of journals, articles, books, and previous design works related to the research topic. In addition, documentation data are also utilized, both from field observations and from the documentation of the brand's production process in collaboration with the vendor KaosKaoz, as supporting material in the design process.

The data analysis technique used in this design is 5W+1H, as this technique has been applied in previous relevant studies and has proven effective in assisting the formulation of design concepts. This analysis examines six main elements: what, to identify the benefits of T-shirt design as an educational medium for Surabaya's historical sites; who, to determine the target audience; when, to establish the timeline for implementation and application of the design; where, to define the media and context in which the design will be applied; why, to explain the rationale and urgency of the design; and how, to describe the process of creating T-shirts with a historical theme of Surabaya. This technique helps structure the design framework in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented according to the research objectives: identifying representative historical sites, translating historical and visual characteristics into T-shirt designs, developing supporting merchandise and digital media, and evaluating the design through stakeholder and target-audience feedback. This stage is still part of the empathize phase, which previously focused on understanding user profiles and consumer behavior, and now continues with the collection of primary data such as interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The interview in this design process was conducted with a representative of the Surabaya City Government responsible for cultural affairs, namely Mr. Herry Purwadi, S.Sn., Head of the Cultural Division of the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism of Surabaya, on June 9, 2025.

The interview aimed to obtain preliminary data regarding strategies for introducing history to the younger generation. Based on the interview results, efforts to promote historical awareness are carried out through various activities, such as exhibitions commemorating Heroes' Day, large-scale theatrical performances of the flag-tearing incident at Hotel Majapahit, theatrical reenactments of battles at the Heroes Monument, and history-themed competitions designed to attract young people's interest. Regarding the use of fashion media, programs based on T-shirts and historical merchandise already exist; however, they are generally not developed sustainably and tend to appear mainly during design competitions. The main challenge in conveying historical values to the younger generation is their low level of interest, which requires patience and creative approaches. The locations and city icons considered most representative as visual materials include the Tunjungan Street area, the Old Town, the Heroes Monument, the Red Bridge, and Hotel Majapahit.

A pre-survey was conducted with the target audience, namely the younger generation, to obtain direct data as the basis for the design, ranging from theme determination and concept development to visualization and media techniques. The pre-survey was conducted using a Google Forms questionnaire with a total of 50 respondents, the majority of whom were aged 17–22 years and were university students. The data collected included demographic information, historical knowledge, media preferences, visual preferences, as well as feedback and suggestions.

The results of the pre-survey indicate that most respondents are familiar with historical sites related to the events of 1945; however, some misconceptions still exist. For example, several respondents identified the Sura and Baya Statue, the Submarine Monument, and the Bamboo Spear Monument as the main locations of these events. These findings highlight the need for historical educational media that is more engaging and easier to understand. In terms of media, social media is the primary choice among respondents, followed by T-shirt merchandise and museums. Therefore, this design utilizes T-shirts as the main medium, supported by Instagram as a complementary platform. Meanwhile, respondents' visual preferences are dominated by a minimalist style combined with streetwear/modern aesthetics, as well as the use of DTG (Direct to Garment) printing techniques, which serve as the basis for the T-shirt design.

In line with the first objective, the interview and pre-survey results confirmed five historical sites as the main design references: Tunjungan Street, the Old Town, Hotel Majapahit, the Red Bridge, and the Heroes Monument. These sites were selected because they are strongly associated with Surabaya's historical identity, the 1945 struggle narrative, and recognizable urban landmarks. In line with the second objective, each site was translated into a visual concept by combining architectural line-art illustration, geometric supporting elements, historical color accents, concise descriptions, coordinates, and bold typography. This translation was intended to make the T-shirt function not only as fashion merchandise but also as a readable and wearable historical medium.

The design direction was therefore made consistent with the objective of producing a communicative educational medium for young adults. The visual approach emphasizes minimalist and modern streetwear aesthetics, because questionnaire data showed that this style was preferred by the target audience. Graphic elements were adjusted to each historical site through color, typography, object form, and layout hierarchy. Visual elements play a crucial role in T-shirts with graphic design content because they help organize messages so that historical information can be communicated clearly and aesthetically.

This stage falls within the Testing phase of the Design Thinking method, which involves evaluating the prototype with potential consumers or members of the target audience. The minimum number of participants in this testing stage consists of one stakeholder and three representatives from the target audience. The selected target audience includes students from the Visual Communication Design (VCD) and Graphic Design programs at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). The purpose of this testing stage is to determine whether the medium is effective, identify any emerging issues, and assess whether any aspects of the design require improvement.

The testing process involved two stakeholders and four potential consumers. The stakeholders included Mr. Herry Purwadi, Head of the Cultural Division, and Mr. Syahrul Anwar, a historian. The stakeholders provided feedback indicating that the designs accurately reflected the historical references and that the historical descriptions employed commonly recognized terminology.

Meanwhile, the target audience focused their feedback on technical design aspects. Their comments included concerns that the coordinate element, when presented within a boxed format, was too visually distracting; that the front design of the Old Town T-shirt lacked consistency with the back design; and that certain details, such as some lines and strokes, appeared excessively thick.

These testing results directly answer the fourth objective. Stakeholders confirmed that the selected historical references and descriptions were appropriate, while target-audience feedback showed that the product was visually acceptable but required technical refinement. Accordingly, revisions were directed

toward simplifying the coordinate box, improving consistency between front and back layouts, and adjusting line thickness so that the final visual composition remained informative, balanced, and suitable for T-shirt application.

Visual Concept

Visually, the design is not only intended to introduce historical topics but also to maintain aesthetic quality. The visuals are developed by considering the design style preferred by the target audience, as obtained from questionnaire data, emphasizing local identity within the predetermined theme. The graphic elements incorporated into the product are adjusted to the topic, including color, typography, and specific forms. Visual elements play a crucial role in fashion, particularly in T-shirts that incorporate graphic design content, because they help organize messages so that historical information can be communicated clearly and aesthetically. The design style used in this project is a combination of modern architectural line-art illustration, geometric elements, and bold typography.

Typography

In this design, two typographic categories are used, namely serif and sans serif. A variety of fonts are applied, as the selected typefaces must align with specific themes. Overall, the primary font used is Montserrat, which is free for use. Montserrat is applied as the main descriptive text as well as for additional supporting information.



Figure 1. Font Montserrat

Color Palette

The color palette in this design is relatively limited, as the illustrations themselves are presented in grayscale. However, there are a few exceptions, such as the Indonesian flag and the Heroes Monument. Additional colors used include red derived from the Indonesian flag, yellow from the monument, and black and white as neutral tones. A cream brown is also used as a complementary color.



Figure 2. Color Palette
(Source: Author's Personal Document)

The layout across all products uses a consistent structure, consisting of a header containing coordinate information and the city name, followed by an object illustration, a historical description, and finally product identity elements such as category, logo, and a QR code element. Meanwhile, the front side presents a more concise version of the overall back design. The five elements featured in the T-shirt layout were developed through discussions with Mr. Dito Chrisdianto, a lecturer in the Independent Entrepreneurship Program during the sixth semester, and through consultations with the project stakeholder, namely the Head of the Cultural Division of the Surabaya City Government.



Figure 3. Example Product Layout
(Source: Author’s Personal Document)

Visualization Process

Moodboard

The main theme of this design is “Introducing Historical Sites of Surabaya through T-shirt Merchandise.” The theme clearly emphasizes the use of T-shirts as a medium for introducing historical places in the city of Surabaya. By utilizing this alternative medium, the introduction of history is integrated with fashion concepts, aiming to engage the younger generation in learning about historical sites.

This product can also function as a distinctive Surabaya merchandise item or souvenir for visitors to the city. In tourism studies, souvenirs are understood not only as traded objects but also as icons of meaning that connect visitors with place, memory, and identity (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). The importance of understanding history as part of identity preservation is a central focus of this theme, ensuring that the younger generation does not forget their historical roots and can take pride in the heritage of their city, Surabaya.






Figure 4. Moodboard

Illustration

The coloring in this design is predominantly grayscale, utilizing value techniques within the imagery. However, the illustration files are initially created using the original colors of the objects, which are then converted into grayscale. The illustration style adopts an architectural approach that emphasizes structural elements while remaining aligned with a modern minimalist theme.

Table. 1. Illustration
(Source: Author’s Personal Document)

No	Illustration	Description
1		<p>Illustration of Tunjungan Street, depicting the Tunjungan corridor viewed from the direction of Siola, with the building that now functions as a museum.</p> <p>The design adopts an eye-level perspective of the Tunjungan corridor, supported by typography placed at the front of the composition.</p> <p>The red color is derived from the Siola building, while the flowing typography creates a dynamic and lively impression, inspired by the abundance of graffiti found along Tunjungan Street.</p>
2		<p>The design adopts the perspective of the Internatio Building and the “Cigar Building,” which is located at “Kota Lama” supported by typography with a vintage and old-style appearance, along with the word Benedenstad, which means “lower city.”</p> <p>The color selection is inspired by the signage system and map boards found in the Kota Lama area, featuring a cream-brown palette.</p> <p>The design elements utilize a rectangular frame that follows the visual style of signage commonly found throughout the “Kota Lama” district.</p>

3		<p>The design carries an Art Deco and modern theme, featuring an object-centered composition supported by typography placed above it, displaying the sequence of the hotel's previous names.</p> <p>As the object itself is presented in white, the only colors used in the design are derived from the Indonesian red-and-white flag.</p> <p>The typography is bold and follows the form and structural characteristics of the object.</p> <p>The rectangular frame elements adopt an Art Deco style that has been further adapted to align with a minimalist theme.</p>
4		<p>The design emphasizes a bold and strong theme, as the object depicted is the Red Bridge, which is well known for its historical significance in the struggle for independence.</p> <p>The concept centers on the object itself, supported by typography that follows the curvature of the bridge.</p> <p>The red color is derived from the bridge itself, while the typography—particularly the word “Red”—is designed to stand out prominently.</p> <p>The graphic elements are inspired by the bridge’s fence patterns.</p>
5		<p>The design carries a bold and strong theme, as the Heroes Monument was built to commemorate the sacrifices of national heroes.</p> <p>Large and assertive typography serves as the background for the Heroes Monument object, with the word “Heroes” in red and “Monument” in white, symbolizing the colors of the Indonesian flag.</p> <p>The design elements include inverted nail motifs and polygonal forms inspired by the symbolic meaning and structure of the monument itself.</p>

Media

In line with the third objective, the primary medium used in this design is T-shirts, which function both as a promotional tool and as a medium for introducing historical sites in the city of Surabaya. In addition to emphasizing educational aspects, the product also considers meaning and aesthetic value, and is designed to introduce historical locations to the target audience, namely the younger generation. Supporting media, including packaging, keychains, and Instagram content connected through QR codes, were developed to extend the historical information beyond the T-shirt surface and strengthen the product's function as heritage-based merchandise.

This T-shirt design integrates educational, historical, and creative elements with the aim of serving as an alternative medium that is expected to increase young people's interest in history, enhance their knowledge of historical sites, and contribute to the preservation of Surabaya's local identity.



Figure 5. Main Media 5 T-Shirt
(Source: Author's Personal Document)

This box packaging is classified as secondary packaging, meaning it does not come into direct contact with the product. It is designed to enhance the product's visual appeal and create a more premium impression. The packaging uses e-flute material with a thickness of 2 millimeters. The dimensions of the box are 20 × 20 × 5 cm, with 5 cm representing the height of the box.



Figure 6. Packaging Box
(Source: Author's Personal Document)

This keychain can serve as a souvenir or keepsake for visitors from outside the city of Surabaya and is suitable for use as a bag accessory. The keychain is made of layered acrylic, with the printed design embedded between the acrylic layers. It has a thickness of 2 mm and measures 8 × 6 cm.



Figure 7. Keychains
(Source: Author's Personal Document)

Instagram serves as one of the most important supporting media, as it contains comprehensive historical information about each historical site along with its sources. This medium is intended for Instagram as a continuation of user interaction from the main T-shirt media through a QR code. The code can be scanned using a mobile phone, after which users will be directly directed to the Instagram page.



Figure 8. Instagram Media
(Source: Author's Personal Document)

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to design Surabaya historical-site-themed T-shirt merchandise as a communicative educational and promotional medium for young adults. The results show that this objective was achieved through the Design Thinking process, which began with understanding the target audience and historical context, continued with problem definition and concept development, and ended with prototype testing. The study confirms that T-shirts can be used as an alternative medium for introducing local history when historical content is translated into visual forms that are close to young people's fashion preferences.

The first objective was answered through the selection of five representative historical sites: the Heroes Monument, Tunjungan Street, Hotel Majapahit, the Old Town, and the Red Bridge. The second objective was answered through the transformation of these sites into minimalist and modern T-shirt designs using architectural line-art illustration, geometric elements, bold typography, selected historical color accents, brief descriptions, coordinates, and QR codes. The third objective was answered through the development of supporting media such as packaging, keychains, stickers, posters, and Instagram content, which expand the educational and promotional function of the main T-shirt products.

The fourth objective was answered through stakeholder and target-audience testing. Stakeholders stated that the designs were aligned with recognizable historical references and used appropriate historical descriptions, while the target audience provided technical input on coordinate placement, front-back layout consistency, and line thickness. These findings indicate that history-themed T-shirt merchandise has the potential to increase historical awareness, promote Surabaya's local identity, and develop into a sustainable heritage-based creative product through collaboration with institutions, museums, tourism destinations, and local creative industries.

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