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# Typographic Street Identity: A Study on Local Café Signage in Kuala Lumpur

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**Abstract:** Typography functions as both a visual communication system and a cultural expression that shapes how identities are perceived within urban environments. In Kuala Lumpur's café culture, particularly within the Golden Triangle, a dense urban district shaped by tourism, commerce, and cultural convergence where signage contributes to atmosphere and place identity. Yet, limited research has examined how typographic choices construct these associations. This study investigates 82 local cafés and 111 typefaces to identify typographic trends and interpret their cultural significance. Using qualitative visual observation and systematic typographic classification, five type categories were analysed: serif, sans serif, monospaced, script, and display. To further understand how viewers perceive signage, the analysis applies six Gestalt principles which include Figure Ground, Similarity, Proximity, Continuation, Closure, and Symmetry examining how contrast, stroke consistency, spacing, visual flow, implied form, and structural balance contribute to legibility and recognition. The findings reveal a strong preference for sans serif typefaces associated with clarity, neutrality, and global minimalist aesthetics. In contrast, serif and script typefaces are employed selectively to evoke heritage, intimacy, and handcrafted identity, particularly in historically layered areas such as Chinatown. These patterns indicate that café signage visually negotiates between modernity and cultural continuity, reflecting broader urban tensions between global branding influences and local identity expression. Overall, typography operates not only as stylistic decoration, but as a medium shaping visual branding, emotional atmosphere, and streetscape identity within Kuala Lumpur's evolving city culture.

**Keywords:** Typography; café signage; Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle; Gestalt principles; urban culture

## Introduction

In the vibrant heart of Kuala Lumpur, the café scene has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, transforming the city's streets into lively hubs of social and cultural activity. This phenomenon reflects the evolution of brand communication, where visual design is intentionally used to create positive associations with a brand's image through its signage. Communication occurs when customers perceive and respond to these visual cues, establishing a sense of trust and emotional connection between both parties. Such interaction is crucial for sustaining long-term customer engagement and contributes significantly to the brand's future development and sustainability (Abrudin & Ganiem, 2024).

Among the many visual components shaping this urban landscape, the aesthetic appeal of café signages stands out as a defining feature that attracts both locals and tourists. Typography, as both an art form and a technical discipline, plays a pivotal role in this process. It enhances written communication by ensuring readability, clarity, and aesthetic harmony, while simultaneously influencing how local businesses are

perceived. This makes typography a core element in establishing a coherent and memorable café identity (Hannah, 2023).

Beyond café branding, the signage found within the study area also represents a form of place branding, contributing to the overall identity and cultural narrative of the streetscape. Place branding can be understood as a network of associations that exists in the consumer's mind, shaped through visual, verbal, and behavioural expressions of a place (Neesa Ameera et al., 2016). Within this framework, every brand plays an important role by reinforcing the distinctiveness, values, and attributes that define a location. This concept involves cultivating a unique character that differentiates one environment from another, achieved through thoughtful design, cultural symbolism, and strategic communication (Ashworth, 2009; Nursanty, 2021; Neesa Ameera et al., 2023).

Café signages therefore function as more than practical identifiers; they act as powerful branding tools that communicate personality, ambience, and quality at a single glance. The typographic choices embedded within these signages form a visual language that captures attention, evokes emotion, and conveys the essence of a café's identity (Lardi, 2024). Whether through sleek and minimalist letterforms that express modern sophistication or ornate vintage-inspired designs that evoke nostalgia, each style reflects the rich cultural diversity and creative energy of Kuala Lumpur.

Recognising typography as both a marker of visual identity and a contributor to the city's cultural narrative, this study explores typographic trends in Kuala Lumpur's café signages and identifies the most prevalent typographic classifications used in these visual forms. Furthermore, it examines how design choices reflect and influence café culture, offering insights into the intersection between branding strategies, aesthetic preferences, and the broader urban experience. Through this approach, typography is examined not merely as a visual design tool but as a reflection of contemporary identity, communication, and cultural continuity within Malaysia's evolving streetscape.

## Literature Review

### 1. Typography

Despite the growing visibility of typography in Kuala Lumpur's café culture, academic inquiry into this subject remains limited. While international scholars have examined typography's influence on branding, readability, and consumer perception, few studies have explored how these principles operate within Malaysia's rapidly developing café landscape. Most existing literature focuses on typography in large-scale corporate contexts such as advertising, packaging, and digital marketing, leaving a gap in understanding how typographic decisions shape the identity of small, independent, and culturally embedded cafés. As Hannah (2023) explains, typography extends beyond aesthetic choice; it is a strategic design element that determines how audiences interpret tone, emotion, and brand personality. This absence of focused study within the Malaysian context highlights the need to analyse typography as a living form of cultural communication that mirrors the nation's evolving urban identity. Prior research in local branding contexts demonstrates that visual elements play an active role in shaping community identity and loyalty (Mustaqimmah, 2024).

The present study seeks to fill this gap by systematically analysing the typographic choices of local café signages in Kuala Lumpur. Through a qualitative visual analysis, the study investigates type classifications, stylistic tendencies, and their cultural implications within three key districts of the city's Golden Triangle. By observing how local cafés utilise typefaces to convey meaning and attract attention, the study contributes to a richer understanding of typography as both a communicative and cultural construct. Faizal and Leila (2024) emphasise that visual identity and brand communication must align with authenticity to foster emotional connection, while Velychko (2024) identifies public typography as a democratic form of visual language that strengthens community identity. These perspectives reinforce the relevance of studying how design elements such as typography engage audiences within Malaysia's multicultural environment.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary contribution to both theory and practice. From an academic perspective, it advances regional scholarship on visual communication by contextualising typographic analysis within Southeast Asia, a region where design is deeply intertwined with cultural

symbolism and local entrepreneurship. The study also complements the work of Neesa Ameera et al. (2023), who highlight how place branding emerges from the visual and behavioural expression of local identity. From a professional standpoint, the findings offer practical guidance for designers, brand consultants, and café owners in making informed typographic decisions that enhance legibility, strengthen recognition, and foster emotional resonance with target audiences. Lardi (2024) further notes that thoughtful typographic design can transform ordinary signage into a storytelling medium that conveys ambience and authenticity. Ultimately, this study positions typography as a bridge between design aesthetics, cultural narrative, and consumer experience, underscoring its vital role in shaping the identity and emotional atmosphere of Kuala Lumpur's dynamic café landscape.

2. Type Classifications

Typography is commonly classified into five primary categories: serif, sans serif, monospaced, script and display (Song, H. et al., 2023; Learn Typography: Type Classification, n.d.). This widely accepted system provides designers with a structured framework for identifying, selecting, and combining typefaces in purposeful ways. Each category demonstrates distinct visual characteristics that influence both the aesthetic quality and the communicative tone of a design. Serif typefaces, with their extended strokes or "feet," evoke a sense of elegance, tradition, and formality, often seen in brands that emphasise heritage or sophistication. Sans serif typefaces, on the other hand, project modernity, simplicity, and clarity, reflecting the minimalist visual trends common in contemporary design (Hannah, 2023). Monospaced typefaces, distinguished by uniform spacing between characters, convey precision, stability, and technical refinement, while display typefaces prioritise decorative expression and are often employed to attract attention and convey personality (Fonts.com, n.d.).

The thoughtful combination of different typographic categories allows designers to achieve visual contrast and harmony. As noted by Faizal and Leila (2024), effective brand communication relies on creative balance and authenticity, both of which are enhanced through strategic use of typographic variety. Professional designers often integrate multiple categories to achieve rhythm, hierarchy, and emphasis, drawing the viewer's eye to key information while maintaining coherence across visual elements. Conversely, depending solely on a single classification can limit creative potential and reduce visual impact. Typography that employs variation in form and structure tends to establish a stronger emotional connection with its audience, reinforcing both memorability and aesthetic value (Velychko, 2024).

In the context of this study, typographic classification serves as the analytical foundation for evaluating the letterforms present in local café signages across Kuala Lumpur. Applying this framework enables the study to systematically identify stylistic patterns, examine design strategies, and determine the typographic categories most frequently employed in the city's café culture. This analytical structure supports a deeper understanding of how designers blend functionality and aesthetics to create signages that are legible, appealing, and contextually meaningful. Ultimately, typographic classification not only guides design decision-making but also provides insight into the visual trends that shape the cultural identity of Kuala Lumpur's evolving streetscapes.

3. Local, Cafe and Local Café

In the context of community development and business, the term *local* refers to anything that is associated with a specific geographic area, typically within a city, town, or neighbourhood. It encompasses independently owned businesses that serve the immediate community, local events that bring residents together, and initiatives that directly impact those living in the area. Although its meaning may vary depending on context, *local* consistently signifies something familiar, accessible, and closely connected to the everyday lives and shared experiences of people within that place (Oxford University Press, 2024). It represents not only proximity but also a sense of belonging, authenticity, and identity rooted in the social fabric of the community.

A *café* is a small and casual establishment that specialises in serving coffee, tea, and light refreshments such as sandwiches, pastries, and snacks. Beyond their menu offerings, cafés are widely recognised for their welcoming atmosphere, providing comfortable spaces for relaxation, social interaction, or remote work.

Typically located in high-footfall areas such as commercial streets, campuses, or creative districts, cafés attract diverse patrons including students, professionals, and tourists. Many cafés incorporate distinctive design features that reflect local culture or individual branding styles, with some also functioning as cultural venues by hosting artistic activities such as poetry readings, live performances, and art exhibitions (HarperCollins Publishers, 2024). In this sense, the café operates as both a business and a social institution that contributes to the vibrancy of urban life.

A *local café* merges these two ideas, referring to a small, community-oriented establishment that serves beverages and light meals within its surrounding neighbourhood. Typically, independently owned, local cafés embody the cultural and social identity of their location. They often prioritise sourcing ingredients from nearby producers, supporting local businesses, and integrating elements of local art, heritage, and craftsmanship into their spatial and visual design. These establishments function as inclusive social spaces where residents can connect, collaborate, or unwind in a familiar environment. By facilitating cultural activities such as open mic sessions, art exhibitions, and community discussions, local cafés contribute to social cohesion, stimulate the local economy, and sustain cultural continuity. Ultimately, they serve as both creative and communal hubs that strengthen relationships between people and place, reinforcing the role of design, atmosphere, and shared experience in fostering a sense of belonging (Collins Dictionary, 2024).

## 4. Signages

Signage refers to any form of visual communication designed to convey information clearly and effectively to a target audience. In a business context, signage functions as a critical medium for delivering messages that influence customer perception, guide decision making, and enhance brand recognition. Effective signage integrates both functional and aesthetic components, ensuring that the information it communicates is easily understood while remaining visually appealing. While some signages are purely utilitarian, serving identification or wayfinding purposes, others are created to fulfil persuasive or promotional objectives, highlighting the distinct qualities, services, or values associated with a brand (Glispin, 2022).

As the first point of visual interaction between a company and potential customers, signage operates as a strategic branding tool that captures attention and communicates brand identity at a glance. It does more than mark a physical location; it establishes an immediate visual connection that influences how audiences perceive the business. Various forms of signage serve diverse roles within this communicative process, including monument signs, storefront nameplates, wayfinding systems, and temporary sidewalk displays. Each is designed according to its physical placement, visibility requirements, and audience engagement goals, combining typography, colour, layout, and materials to achieve maximum clarity and impact.

Advancements in design technology have further transformed signage into a dynamic and interactive medium. The integration of digital solutions such as LED billboards, LCD panels, and electronic paper displays has expanded the potential for delivering animated or real time content that can adapt to context and consumer behaviour. These innovations have blurred the boundary between traditional print-based signage and digital marketing interfaces, creating new possibilities for interactive and immersive brand communication. Regardless of format, well executed signage remains an essential component of both commercial and public environments, combining visual clarity with aesthetic appeal to communicate effectively, attract attention, and reinforce brand presence (Glispin, 2022).

Within the scope of this study, café signages represent a specialised category of business signage in which typography plays a central role. Beyond identifying an establishment, the selection of typeface, spatial arrangement, and visual composition communicates the café's personality, tone, and atmosphere. Typography therefore becomes not merely a tool of legibility but an expression of identity and emotion that connects with customers on a visual and psychological level. In this way, café signage functions simultaneously as a communicative, aesthetic, and cultural artefact that contributes to the formation of Kuala Lumpur's urban identity and streetscape character.

**Methodology**

1. Research Design
This study adopts a qualitative research approach to gain an in depth and holistic understanding of the typographic features present in local café signages. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this investigation because it prioritises the interpretation of visual and contextual details, allowing for a richer exploration of meaning beyond numerical data. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on measurement and statistical generalisation, this approach enables a nuanced examination of design decisions, stylistic variations, and cultural influences embedded in café signage.

A systematic review framework was applied to guide the process, ensuring consistency and transparency in data collection, organisation, and analysis. This method was selected because systematic reviews provide a standardised structure that enhances clarity and reproducibility, enabling relevant data to be identified, assessed, and synthesised comprehensively. By following this approach, the reliability of the review is strengthened through the minimisation of bias and the provision of a clear and well documented account of how data was selected, evaluated, and analysed throughout the study process (Wolfe et al., 2019; Wan Nor Azmi et al., 2024). The scope of the study was limited to three key locations within Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle, a vibrant urban area known for its dense concentration of cafés and diverse cultural influences. These locations were chosen for their significance in representing both the commercial and cultural heartbeat of the city. To maintain the study's focus, only cafés that were locally established and Malaysian owned were included in the dataset. Each café was verified through online information, social media presence, and on-site observation to confirm its eligibility.

Data collection relied primarily on direct observation, supported by purposive sampling. This method ensured that the selected signage examples were representative of the area and captured a broad spectrum of design styles and typographic choices. Observation is valuable as it allows first-hand experience rather than relying entirely on secondary sources. Data collected in this way provide meaningful and reliable insights, as the researcher can watch, listen, and record all relevant information (Neesa Ameera et al., 2016). Fieldwork involved photographing and documenting each signage in its actual streetscape environment, noting variables such as size, material, colour palette, and spatial placement (Liu, Z., 2024).
Once collected, the signage data were systematically categorised according to typographic classifications, including serif, sans serif, monospaced, and display, as well as additional design characteristics such as letter spacing, hierarchy, and decorative details. This categorisation process provided a structured foundation for the subsequent visual analysis.

A systematic visual analysis was conducted to identify emerging trends, recurring patterns, and distinctive stylistic features within the dataset. The analysis considered not only the formal aspects of the typefaces but also their functional roles in branding, legibility from various distances, and visual integration within the surrounding urban environment. Furthermore, the typographic data were examined through the principles of Gestalt Theory to explore perceptual and psychological dimensions of design. Gestalt Theory provides a framework for understanding how people perceive visual information as organised and meaningful wholes. Applying its six core principles, namely Figure Ground, Similarity, Proximity, Continuation, Closure, and Symmetry, allowed this study to evaluate how typographic composition, spacing, and balance influence visual perception and aesthetic appeal. This integration of cognitive and visual analysis strengthened the qualitative interpretation by connecting design observation with perceptual theory, ensuring that findings reflect both creative intent and viewer experience.

2. Research Instruments
In this qualitative research, the research instruments refer to the structured tools used to collect, record, and organise observational data related to café signages. Rather than focusing solely on technical equipment, these instruments were designed to ensure systematic and consistent data collection aligned with the study's objectives. The primary instruments employed in this study were the observation checklist, field notes form, and typographic coding table.

The observation checklist was developed to systematically record typographic features such as classification (serif, sans serif, script, monospaced, display), stylistic traits, and visual characteristics observed in each café signage. The field notes form was used to document contextual details including signage size, materials, colour palette, spatial placement, and surrounding environmental elements. Meanwhile, the typographic coding table functioned as an analytical framework to categorise and interpret the collected data based on design characteristics and Gestalt principles. This structure allowed for pattern recognition and trend identification across the selected areas.

In addition to these instruments, several data collection aids supported the observation process. A digital camera (Canon EOS RP) was used to capture high-resolution images of café signages, ensuring visual clarity for detailed typographic analysis. Google Earth assisted in verifying geographic locations and spatial boundaries within Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle, while Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop were utilised to enhance images, annotate typographic features, and organise data visually. By integrating both structured instruments and supportive tools, the study ensured that the collected data were comprehensive, reliable, and contextually grounded, forming a strong foundation for qualitative visual analysis of typographic trends in local café signages.

3. Data Collection

The data collection phase served as the foundation of this study, ensuring that each café signage was documented within its physical, cultural, and visual context. A systematic sampling approach was used to identify 82 cafés located within Kuala Lumpur City Centre, Chinatown, and Bukit Bintang, the core areas of the Golden Triangle.

Each signage was photographed in situ using a *Canon EOS RP* to preserve typographic clarity and environmental detail. Field notes were recorded to capture surrounding architectural cues, façade treatments, materials, lighting conditions, and spatial relationships of the signage to the streetscape. These contextual observations were crucial because signage functions not merely as a typographic display but as part of a communicative landscape embedded within neighbourhood identity.

4. Data Analysis

Following data collection, each signage was manually classified according to typeface category (Serif, Sans Serif, Monospaced, Script, and Display) and stylistic sub-types (such as Neo-Grotesque, Transitional, Slab, or Calligraphic). Typeface identification was performed through visual comparison using type specimen references and digital font libraries to ensure accuracy. This manual classification enabled visual coding to identify recurring typographic tendencies across the three study areas.

Gestalt Theory was then applied to analyse how typographic forms influence perception, focusing on six key principles including Figure Ground, Similarity, Proximity, Continuation, Closure, and Symmetry. This analytical framework allowed the study to move beyond stylistic description toward understanding how signage design communicates identity, atmosphere, and brand intention. Through this structured process, the analysis remained credible, verifiable, and reflective of Kuala Lumpur's evolving typographic character within its café streetscape.

**The Findings**

This section presents the key findings derived from the typographic and perceptual analyses of 82 café signages located within Golden Triangle's areas. The findings are divided into two main parts: first, the Typographic Classification Analysis, which identifies dominant typeface categories, styles, and their visual characteristics; and second, the Gestalt Theory Analysis, which interprets how these typographic forms influence perception, legibility, and emotional response. Together, these analyses reveal how typography functions not only as a design element but also as a reflection of cultural identity and urban expression within Kuala Lumpur's café landscape.

# 1. Typographic Classification Analysis

Table 1. Kuala Lumpur City Centre

| No. | Café | Font | Classifications | | | | | Style | Characteristic (s) |
|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------------------|
| | | | Serif | Sans-Serif | Mono-spaced | Script | Display | | |
| 1. | Piccadilly Café  | Europa Grotesk SH | | / | / | | | Geometric | Versatile, clean, bold, strong |
| 2. | Mountbatten Café KL  | TXT Monique  | | | | / | | Handwriting | Playful, casual, fluid strokes |
| | | Antipasto Pro  | | / | / | | | Geometric | Clean, modern aesthetic |
| 3. | 8055 Coffee  | Intro Rust | | | | | / | | Retro, playful, round, fancy, rough |
| 4. | LOKL Coffee Co  | Distinct Style Sans | | / | / | | | Geometric | Modern, stylish, clean, sleek |
| 5. | Jamboo Café  | Hess Gothic Round NF | | / | / | | | Geometric | Informal, rounded, casual, playful |
| 6. | Timothy Café  | Fixed  | | / | | | | Humanist sans | Rounded cut, soft, playful |
| | | Big Brush  | | | | / | | Casual | Fresh, neat, strong, fast |
| 7. | Kafe Kleptokrat  | Alexander | / | | / | | | Slab | Spartan, minimal, uniform |

| No. | Café | Font | Serif | Sans-Serif | Mono-spaced | Script | Display | Style | Characteristic(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | Jokopi | Geogrotesque Sharp | / | / | | | | Neo-grotesque | Square, boxy, clean, modern versatile, neutral |
| 9. | Lekiu Cafe | Masthina | | | | / | | Calligraphic | Modern, bouncy, natural, flowing |
| 10. | The Toffee | Metaluna Inline | / | / | | | | Geometric | Sleek, modern, cutting-edge tech |
| 11. | ZUS Coffee | Editor | / | | | | | Transitional | Prominent wedge-shaped, contrast stroke |
| 12. | Secret Recipe | Mistral | | | | / | | Casual | Sophisticated, effortless |
| 13. | Capital Cafe | Sign Designer JNL | / | / | | | | Grotesque | Embossed, vintage |
| 14. | Gigi Coffee | Tamba Sans | / | | | | | Geometric | Bold, distinctly condense, slightly squarish |
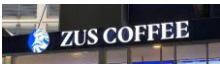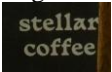
Table 2. Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur

| No. | Café | Font | Serif | Sans-Serif | Mono-spaced | Script | Display | Style | Characteristic(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | **Chinatown** | | | | |
| | | | Serif | Sans-Serif | Mono-spaced | Script | Display | | |
| 1. | Zus Coffee | Avenir Next World | | / | / | | | Geometric | Clean, casual, friendly, bold |
| 2. | Kakao Origin. | Classic Roman | / | | | | | Glyphic | Elegance, history, timeless |
| 3. | Old Town White Coffee | Union | / | | | | | Transitional | Elegant, round, classic, highly contemporary |

| No. | Name | Typeface | | | | | Classification | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | Secawan | Greyspark Sans | | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Light retro charm, cleanb |
| 5. | Chinatown Cendol | Slam | / | | | | Transitional | Sturdy, elegant |
| 6. | Bo The Advocado | Ragazzi | / | | | | Transitional | Balanced, versatile, modern, distinctive |
| 7. | Blob Cafe | Kiddy Kitty | | / | | | Geometric | Soft, friendly |
| 8. | Kopi Dua Darjat | Lil Stuart | | | | / | Casual | Vivid, strong, optimistic, expressive |
| | | FT Mammoth | | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Heavy, tough |
| 9. | KLCG | Flareserif 821 | / | | | | Glyphic | Book, classy, formal, narrow |
| 10. | Light Capture Café by H.O.N | Bridone | / | | | | Transitional | High contrast, traditional, natural |
| 11. | Tea Thambi Café | Kunze | | / | | | Slab | Book, display, friendly, informal |
| 12. | Ola Froyo Café | Avenir | | / | / | | Geometric | Organic, original, casual, clean |

| No. | Name | Typeface | | | | Classification | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | Summation | Gopher Display | / | / | | Geometric | Reverse contrast, geometric |
| 14. | Stellar Coffee | Windsor Regular | / | | | Slab | Heavy rounded, Strong diagonal stress |
| | | Baligo Bold | | | / | Handwriting | Playful, bright, cheerful |
| 15. | Pucks Coffee | Nimbus Sans | | / | | Neo-grotesque | Harmony, versatile, precise |
| 16. | Aooo Melbourne Café | Sky Serif | / | | | Transitional | Elegant, unique, antique, mechanistic |
| 17. | Flaon Café | Ionic No 5 | / | | | Didone | Clear, direct, stylish, classic |
| 18. | Dodoo Kitchen | Tappatarap | | / | | Humanist sans | Light, modern, minimal |
| | | Hello Paris | | | / | Handwriting | Sophisticated, elegant, luxury, harmony |
| 19. | Cafe ETC | Musk | / | | | Transitional | Elegant, high contrast, expressive |
| 20. | Niko Neko Matcha 2.0 | Futura | | / | / | Geometric | Young, fresh, efficient, functional |

| No. | Name | Font | | | | Classification | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. | Monograph Café & Dining | Nominee | / | / | | Geometric | Clean, clear, versatile, bold |
| 22. | Fluffed | Namyv | / | | | Slab | Modern, unique, balanced, simple |
| 23. | Nomad's Café | Martin | / | / | | Humanist sans | Unusual, rounded portions |
| 24. | Leaf & Co. Café | Courier New OS Regular | / | | | Slab | Thick, block-like serif |
| 25. | Mingle Café | LayarBahtera Doomsday Light | / | | | Humanist sans | Designed with the most basic shapes of geometry. |
| 26. | Jao Tim | Window Treatment JNL | / | | | Geometric | Classic, thick and thin line |
| 27. | Monster A Garden Café | Univers Next Pro 520 | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Consistent, clean, elegance |
| 28. | Yew Yew Coffee | Baby Sister | | | / | Handwriting | Playful, rounded-edges, informal, casual, irregular |
| 29. | Lim Kee Café | Magic Ramen | / | | | Neo-grotesque | An oddball sans-serif with weird contrast. Has playful and strange features. |
| 30. | Neighbour Club by JWC | Speedy Black | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Futuristic, high speed, full of energy |

| No. | Name | Font | | | | | Classification | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31. | Beryl's Chocolate Café | Nazanin | / | | | | Transitional | Bold, strong, well-balanced, proportional |
| | | Life | / | | | | Transitional | Contemporary, sturdy, neutral |
| 32. | Kafei Dian | Futura | | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Young, fresh, efficient, functional |
| 33. | Ali, Muthu & Ah Hock | Oliver Label | | | | / | Handwriting | Creative, realistic pencil texture, |
| | | Aktifo | | / | | | Neo-grotesque | Morn, contemporary, functional |
| | | Big Brush | | | / | | Casual | Fresh, neat, strong, fast |
| 34. | Old China Café | Bodrum Slab | / | | | | Slab | Not purely geometric, harmonious |
| 35. | Luck Bros Kopi | Noelle | / | | | | Glyphic | Classic, minimalist, modern, clean |
| 36. | Ho Kow Hainanese Kopitiam | Kelpt | | / | / | | Neo-grotesque | Modern, rounded, clean, unique |
| 37. | Ching Ching by Pandan Republic | Favela | | / | | | Humanist sans | Experimental, extreme |

| 38. | The Hungry Tapir  | Highbrow Cafetorium JNL | / | | Neo-grotesque | Minimalist, high verticals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 39. | Junk Café  | Shoganai | | / | | Brush-like, heavy display |
| 40. | Merchant's Lane  | FF DIN Pro | / | | Neo-grotesque | Stylish, commercial, minimal |
| 41. | LaGula by The Hungry Tapir  | Cori *Definitely have been distorted and edited to achieve final look | | / | Graphic | Balloon like, vibrant, fun, casual |
| 42. | Flaaah The Bakery | Europa Grotesk No. 2 SH  | / | | Neo-grotesque | Clean, simple, modern |
| | | Unknown Font *different stroke on each 'A' shows that this font might be uniquq to Flaaah the Bakery only  | | / | | Balloon like, vibrant, fun, casual |
| 43. | Kaffe 16  | Yassitf | / | / | Neo-grotesque | Blend, contrast, simple |
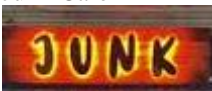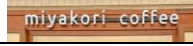
Table 3. Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur

| No. | Café | Font | Serif | Sans-Serif | Mono-spaced | Script | Display | Style | Characteristic(s) |
|-----|------|------|-------|-----------|-------------|--------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| | | | **Bukit Bintang** | Classifications | | | | Style | Characteristic(s) |
| 1. | Miyakori coffee | The Branding SF | | / | | | | Neo-grotesque | Modern, narrow, compress, casual |
| 2. | Nikko and Yoryo Cafe | Formular | | / | | | | Neo-grotesque | Technical, clean, simple, modern |
| 3. | Bröom | MD Grotesque Regular | | / | / | | | Geometric | Modern, minimalist feel, high readability, extremely versatile |
| 4. | Breakfast Spot | The NF Elena | | / | | | | Humanist sans | Decorative, contemporary, stylistic, display |
| | | Nervous | | | | / | | Handwriting | Strokes, pretty, organic |
| 5. | Three Years Old Café | Black Pink Signature | | | | / | | Calligraphic | Elegance, authentic, luxurious |
| | | Edensor | / | | | | | Transitional | Classy, contemporary, modern, elegance, clean |
| 6. | VCR Café | **Unknown Font** *might be an original font (private) / handwriting. | | | | / | | Handwriting | Strong, abstract |
| 7. | Sloaft Café (by JWC) | Klickclack *Definitely have been distorted and edited to achieve final look | | | | | / | Graphic | Heavy, retro, fun, playful, bold |
| 8. | Ruby Café | Lumier Rounded | | / | | | | Grotesque | Rounded, retro, playful, |

| 9. | Ms. Wong Bao & Tea | Cardamon | / | | Didone | Versatile, asymmetric, |
| | | BF Tara | / | | Neo-grotesque | Plain, modern, commercial, casual |
| 10. | Inspire Café | Futura | / | | Neo-grotesque | Young, fresh, efficient, functional |
| 11. | Solace Bukit Bintang | Rawgly | / | | Didone | Decorative, modern, contrast, elegant |
| 12. | The Rabbit Hole | Tolyer | / | | Neo-grotesque | Versatile, fancy, industrial, retro, comic |
| 13. | Brew & Bread | The State Wide | / | | Neo-grotesque | Rough, extreme, sport, book |
| 14. | Feeka Coffee Roasters | Cooperative | / | | Neo-grotesque | Retro, vintage, chic, versatile |

| 15. | The Third Letter | Kepler | / | | Transitional | Modern, formal, conservative, elegant |
|-----|------------------|--------|---|--|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| 16. | The Coffee Academics | Copperplate EF | / | | Glyphic | Modern, simple, minimalist |
| 17. | HWC Coffee | Sabler Titling | / | | Geometric | Vintage, display, classic, casual |
| 18. | Tom & Danny Coffee | Emblema | / | | Neo-grotesque | Retro, modern, vintage, versatile |
| 19. | Capitol Cafe | Zierde Grotesk Bold | / | | Grotesque | Modern, strong |
| 20. | Toast Maker | Scene | / | | Geometric | Squarish, clean, casual, minimal |
| 21. | Optimist Coffee | Orqquidea | / | | Neo-grotesque | Modern, roman, casual, bold |
| 22. | Kita Coffee | HK Requisite | / | | Neo-grotesque | Compact, clean, strong, modern |

| 23. | V88 Café and Bar | Cantilever *The closest font can be found and it might be an original font (private) / handwriting. | | / | Graphic | Square, techno, display, decorative |
| 24. | The Messenger by JWC | Carnova | / | | Neo-grotesque | Plain, modern, clean, simple |
| 25. | MMM Café by lesim | Palmer Lake *The closest font can be found and it might be an original font (private) / handwriting. | | / | Casual | Handwriting. Cute, brush, playful |

Table 4. Summary of typographic classifications in Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle

| Font Classification | Kuala Lumpur City Centre | Chinatown | Bukit Bintang | Total Usage | Key Insight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sans Serif** | 9 | 25 | 17 | 51 | Dominant across all locations; reflects a strong preference for modern, minimal, and legible visual identities. |
| **Serif** | 2 | 16 | 5 | 23 | Most concentrated in Chinatown; suggests intentional referencing of heritage and classical design traditions. |
| **Monospaced** | 8 | 8 | 1 | 17 | Minimal usage in Bukit Bintang; indicates lower adoption of utilitarian or typewriter-inspired aesthetics in commercial zones. |
| **Script** | 4 | 6 | 4 | 14 | Used to convey warmth, personality, and artisanal branding, especially in independent cafés. |
| **Display** | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 | Applied selectively to create standout or experimental visual identities, most notable in Chinatown. |
| **Total** | 24 | 58 | 29 | 111 | Chinatown demonstrates the highest stylistic diversity; Bukit Bintang maintains the most commercially streamlined typographic identity. |

This section presents the findings derived from the visual and typographic analysis of café signages within Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle, focusing on how typeface selection and perceptual structure shape the area's visual identity. The discussion integrates both typographic classification and Gestalt-based interpretation, highlighting the relationship between form, function, and cultural meaning in the city's café streetscape.

The analysis of 111 typefaces across the three study areas reveals distinct typographic tendencies that define the visual identity of local cafés in Kuala Lumpur. Sans serif typefaces dominate with 51 instances (45%), particularly in Neo-Grotesque and Geometric styles. Their clean and rational forms align with contemporary branding strategies that emphasise legibility, clarity, and minimalism (Henderson, Giese, & Cote, 2004; Günay, 2024), reflecting a global preference for streamlined visual communication (Mehra, 2023).

Similarly, Shazleen Mohamed et al. (2024) emphasise that cohesive visual narratives, whether expressed through typography or motion media, enhance audience engagement and strengthen brand identity within Malaysia's cultural and corporate contexts.

Serif typefaces (23 instances, 21%) are most prevalent in Chinatown, where Transitional and Slab Serif styles evoke heritage, craftsmanship, and classical sensibility. This supports Song et al. (2023), who note that typographic authenticity strengthens perceptions of cultural continuity and place attachment. Their presence suggests a deliberate effort to preserve local identity within globalised design trends (Faizal & Leila, 2024).

Script typefaces (14 instances, 13%) introduce warmth and individuality through hand-rendered qualities, reinforcing the artisanal and human character of independent cafés. This echoes Lardi's (2024) perspective that expressive typography fosters emotional connection and brand authenticity. Meanwhile, Monospaced (16 instances, 15%) and Display fonts (6 instances, 5%) are used selectively to achieve distinction or creative impact, often balancing artistic appeal with functional clarity (Childers & Jass, 2002).

From a perceptual standpoint, these typographic patterns align closely with Gestalt Theory, which explains how viewers perceive café signages as cohesive compositions rather than isolated letterforms. The principle of Figure Ground is most evident in sans serif designs, where high contrast between text and background enhances legibility (Koffka, 1922; Interaction Design Foundation, 2016). Similarity and Proximity appear in signages such as Gigi Coffee and Merchant's Lane, where uniform stroke weights and consistent spacing create visual unity. Continuation, seen in Feeka Coffee Roasters, guides the viewer's eye smoothly across the text, reinforcing readability and brand recall.

Closure is evident in script-based signages, where incomplete or implied letterforms invite the audience to complete the shapes mentally, evoking approachability and craftsmanship. Symmetry, apparent in heritage cafés such as Ho Kow Hainanese Kopitiam, enhances stability and visual harmony, linking traditional balance with modern design sensibilities. Collectively, these perceptual effects strengthen both legibility and aesthetic coherence, allowing café signages to communicate effectively within the dynamic visual context of Kuala Lumpur.

Taken together, the typographic trends and Gestalt interpretations reveal that café signage in Kuala Lumpur functions as both a visual and cultural signifier. The dominance of sans serif forms reflects modern branding priorities, while serif and script styles convey continuity, heritage, and local identity. Gestalt principles explain how these visual systems achieve clarity, unity, and emotional resonance within the streetscape. Typography therefore operates not merely as decoration, but as an active medium through which place identity is experienced, remembered, and communicated in the urban fabric of the city.

**Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the significant role of typography in shaping the identity, atmosphere, and cultural character of local cafés in Kuala Lumpur. The analysis of 82 cafés encompassing 111 typefaces reveals that typographic design acts not only as a branding strategy but also as a visual language that conveys cultural values, lifestyle aspirations, and spatial identity. Typeface choices influence how cafés are perceived and remembered, ensuring signage remains visually engaging, legible, and contextually meaningful within the urban environment.

Each typographic classification evokes distinct emotional and perceptual responses: sans serif typefaces communicate modernity and clarity; serif forms express heritage and trust; while script styles introduce warmth and a sense of personal connection. These expressive differences align with Gestalt principles such as Figure Ground, Continuation, and Closure, which explain how clear contrast, visual flow, and implied form support readability and viewer recognition. Through these perceptual dynamics, café signage achieves a balance between visual simplicity, brand personality, and cultural resonance.

Collectively, the findings highlight how contemporary café signage contributes to Kuala Lumpur's evolving visual identity, where global design trends intersect with local cultural expression. Typography thus operates as more than aesthetic decoration as it is a form of cultural communication that shapes both consumer experience and the character of the streetscape.

Future studies may extend this analysis by comparing typographic identities across different Malaysian cities, allowing for a broader understanding of how urban culture and design sensibilities develop in relation to place, history, and community identity. Such comparative work would further clarify how typography participates in the visual storytelling of Malaysian urban life and positions typography as a sociocultural text embedded in the city's everyday visual landscape, shaping how Kuala Lumpur is perceived, experienced, and remembered.

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