Indonesian Journal of Language, Space, and Visual Arts
Vol. 1, No. 3, September 2026, pp. 136~149
ISSN: 3163-8333, DOI: https://doi.org/10.67490/ijls.v1i3.1015

Reading the vernacular city: shop signs, street typography, and the semiotics of everyday urban life in Indonesia

Nor Mohammad Abdoeh
Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Jul 9, 2026
Revised Aug 17, 2026
Accepted Sep 25, 2026

Keywords:

commercial signage;
geosemiotics;
Indonesia;
linguistic landscape;
vernacular typography.

ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian urban streets are increasingly shaped by shop signs, banners, food-stall boards, façade lettering, and street typography that make everyday commercial life publicly visible while mediating language hierarchy, material improvisation, and spatial belonging. **Objective:** This study examines how vernacular shop signs and street typography construct semiotic meanings in Indonesian urban space through language choice, typographic form, material surface, and emplacement. **Method:** This study applies a qualitative multimodal linguistic landscape design, integrating geosemiotic emplacement analysis, multimodal typography and materiality audit, and linguistic hierarchy and identity coding on a corpus of publicly accessible visual, secondary, and contextual materials. **Results:** Fixed shopfront naming emerged as the most visible form of urban commercial identification, showing how façade-based signs stabilize trust, address, and business recognizability. Flexible banners and temporary displays indicated a different logic of visibility, shaped by affordability, mobility, and everyday commercial adaptation. Indonesian and locally recognizable expressions remained central to routine commercial address, while English appeared selectively in service, tourism, and orientation contexts. **Implication:** These findings show that vernacular signage functions as everyday infrastructure for reading Indonesian urban life, not merely as decoration or branding. **Novelty:** This study foregrounds street typography and material emplacement as core variables in Indonesian linguistic landscape research.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.

Corresponding Author:

Nor Mohammad Abdoeh
Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia
Jalan Lingkar Salatiga Km. 2, Pulutan, Sidorejo, Kota Salatiga, Jawa Tengah, 50714, Indonesia
Email: abduhiainsalatiga@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's vernacular city is increasingly produced through ordinary commercial signs, street typography, improvised banners, food-stall boards, service advertisements, and layered shopfront texts. This visual density is socially consequential because Indonesia is now predominantly urban: World Bank data report that 59.2% of Indonesia's population lived in urban areas in 2024. Urban everyday life is also strongly shaped by small-scale commerce; KADIN's compilation of Ministry data records around 30.18 million registered non-agricultural MSMEs as of 31 December 2024. These figures matter because small shops, mobile vendors, barber shops, cafés, pharmacies, and food stalls do not merely occupy city streets; they write them. Their signs mediate competition, visibility, trust, locality, aspiration, and social address. Reading such signs therefore offers a way to understand how Indonesian urban life is publicly organized through language, typography, material form, and everyday visual negotiation.

Existing scholarship has established a strong foundation for examining Indonesian public signage through linguistic landscape, geosemiotic, and multimodal approaches. Studies have analyzed English on

Balikpapan thoroughfares [1], dialogic globalization in Indonesian urban signage [2], hotel and restaurant landscapes in Bali [3], train-station signage in Malang [4], Bali shopfront geosemiotics [5], Braga Street tourism signage [6], and culinary signboards in Kupang [7]. Comparative work on shop signs, cafés, street posters, and urban semiotics has also shown how commercial texts encode power, memory, mobility, and lifestyle economies [8], [9], [10], [11]. Yet much of this work still privileges language choice, multilingual distribution, and sign function, while typography, visual improvisation, material wear, and vernacular design remain under-theorized as primary semiotic resources.

This study examines how shop signs and street typography construct meanings in everyday Indonesian urban spaces. It asks how linguistic choices, typographic forms, visual layouts, material surfaces, and spatial placements work together to produce social meanings of locality, modernity, informality, commercial identity, and belonging. Rather than treating signage as detached text, this study reads signs as emplaced artifacts: objects attached to façades, hung across alleys, printed on tarpaulins, painted on walls, layered on vehicles, or inserted into crowded streetscapes. This focus enables a more precise account of how Indonesian, local languages, English, Arabic, Chinese characters, youth slang, brand names, and graphic styles are made visible within commercial environments. Methodologically, this study combines linguistic landscape analysis, geosemiotics, multimodal social semiotics, and street-level visual documentation to connect what signs say, how they look, where they appear, and what forms of urban life they make legible.

This study advances an argument that vernacular urban signs are not secondary decorations of commerce but everyday infrastructures of semiotic order. They classify businesses, attract customers, signal credibility, mark ethnic or religious affiliation, display local pride, and translate global design idioms into Indonesian street conditions. This argument builds on recent Indonesian work showing that public signage mediates identity, tourism, multilingualism, and economic positioning [6], [7], [12], but it shifts analytical emphasis toward typography and material visibility as forms of urban knowledge. The provisional claim is that Indonesian street signs produce a vernacular grammar of the city: a patterned yet unstable system in which language hierarchy, design imitation, local memory, informality, and commercial survival are negotiated in public view. Such an approach has implications for urban semiotics, sociolinguistics, visual culture, and the study of everyday Indonesian modernity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Linguistic landscape

Linguistic landscape research provides a primary entry point for reading shop signs as socially meaningful texts rather than neutral commercial labels. In this field, public signage is commonly understood as visible language in shared space, yet recent studies have expanded this definition beyond language display toward emplacement, visual hierarchy, and social power. Indonesian scholarship has shown that signage in schools, stations, tourist streets, religious sites, and commercial zones organizes multilingual visibility and institutional identity [13], [14], [1], [4], [15]. However, a narrower language-counting approach risks overlooking how urban signs work as situated semiotic events.

A more analytical use of linguistic landscape requires attention to its internal indicators: language choice, code mixing, translation, script, audience design, spatial placement, and sign function. Studies of Balikpapan thoroughfares, Bali hotels and restaurants, Kotabaru Malang Station, Lembang tourism, and Indonesia–Timor Leste border signage demonstrate that Indonesian, English, local languages, and foreign scripts are not distributed randomly but positioned through economic, cultural, and institutional logics [1], [3], [16], [4], [17]. These indicators allow public signs to be read as structured evidence of hierarchy, accommodation, identity, and urban address.

2.2. Geosemiotics

Geosemiotics refines this approach by defining signs through their relationship with place, mobility, interaction, and material environment. Unlike linguistic landscape studies that may treat signs as stable textual objects, geosemiotic analysis asks how meaning changes when a sign is attached to a façade, placed beside traffic, layered over older signs, or embedded in tourist circulation. Indonesian studies on Bali shopfronts, North Bali commercial signs, and multilingual tourism landscapes show that emplacement shapes intended meaning and social interpretation [3], [5], [18]. Comparable work on historical districts and shared streets strengthens this spatial reading of signage [19], [20].

The main indicators of geosemiotic analysis include emplacement, interaction order, visual composition, spatial scale, material durability, directionality, and proximity to bodies or routes. Research on Braga Street, Kya Kya Surabaya, Bandar Grissee, and Malang public spaces indicates that signs are shaped by tourism branding, heritage memory, religious visibility, and commercial competition [6], [21], [22], [23]. These studies confirm that signs do not merely represent places; they help produce spatial identity. For this reason, street signs must be studied as objects that combine language, position, movement, and urban atmosphere.

2.3. Street typography and multimodal

Street typography and multimodal design form a third essential lens because shop signs communicate through letter shape, colour, layout, material, image, and texture. Typography is often treated as visual style, but recent scholarship suggests that it also carries sociolinguistic and ideological meaning. Work on typographic landscapes, vernacular typography, product branding, café signs, culinary shop signs, and commercial visual branding shows how lettering indexes authenticity, modernity, class aspiration, local craft, and global taste [9], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28]. Typography therefore functions as social evidence, not mere decoration.

The indicators of typographic and multimodal analysis include script choice, font style, hand-painted or digital production, colour contrast, logo placement, image–text relation, layering, material wear, and visual salience. Studies of coffee-shop signboards in Padang, Bali commercial signage, Kupang culinary boards, Johor Bahru community landscapes, and Chinese café neon signs show that commercial signs frequently translate identity into recognizable graphic systems [29], [30], [7], [31], [11]. This literature positions this study at the intersection of linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, and visual semiotics, treating Indonesian shop signs as vernacular infrastructures of everyday urban meaning.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the visible shop sign or street-level typographic item documented in publicly accessible Indonesian urban space. Each item is treated as a multimodal artifact consisting of verbal text, script, typography, colour, layout, material surface, placement, and surrounding spatial context. This unit follows recent Indonesian linguistic landscape and geosemiotic work that reads signs as emplaced objects rather than isolated written texts [1], [2], [5], [7]. The corpus contains primary visual items, secondary scholarly literature, and contextual regulatory or repository documents, allowing visual description, conceptual comparison, and methodological control to remain distinct.

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code	Data Type	Source	Period	Number	Characteristics
PV001–PV004	Primary visual archive	Wikimedia Commons image files	2007–2020	4	Shopfront, culinary signboard, pharmacy sign, commercial street corridor
PV005	Primary public media still	Deutsche Welle public media page	2022	1	Storefront signscape with social-enterprise and commercial visibility
PV006	Primary public photo page	Unsplash	2023	1	Street-name typography and wayfinding comparator
PV007–PV008	Primary public blog photos	Public blog pages	2012–2015	2	Retail, price display, banner, and roadside service signage
SL001–SL018	Secondary literature	DOI-indexed journal articles	2021–2026	18	Linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, typography, commercial signage
PV009, CT001–CT004	Context data	Wikimedia Commons categories and BPK regulation database	2014–2026	5	Repository categories, official traffic-sign regulation, heritage sign comparator

This study uses a qualitative multimodal linguistic landscape design supported by structured corpus documentation. The design is appropriate because this research does not test causal effects but interprets how signs become meaningful through language, materiality, and emplacement. Linguistic landscape analysis identifies visible languages, scripts, code mixing, and sign functions; geosemiotics examines placement, visibility, and interaction order; multimodal social semiotics analyzes typography, colour, image, and layout. This combination follows recent studies of Indonesian urban signage, tourism signs, commercial signboards, and typographic landscapes [3], [4], [16], [9].

Information sources were selected from public, traceable, and verifiable materials. Primary visual data were drawn from open visual repositories, public media pages, public photography pages, and accessible blog pages containing Indonesian shopfront or street-sign images. Secondary data were selected from peer-reviewed studies on Indonesian and comparative linguistic landscapes, including works on Balikpapan, Bali, Malang, Kupang, Bandung, Gresik, and international shop-sign streetscapes [1], [3], [32], [22]. Context data were taken from repository categories and public regulation databases to distinguish vernacular commercial signs from official signage systems.

Data collection proceeded through ten steps: identifying relevant public channels, applying keyword searches, setting Indonesian urban and commercial-sign boundaries, recording metadata, saving source URLs, transcribing visible text where available, describing visual elements, assigning unique document codes, checking duplicate titles or source keys, and separating primary, secondary, and contextual records. Keywords included "shop signs Indonesia," "linguistic landscape Indonesia," "commercial outdoor signs Bali," "street typography Indonesia," "*papan nama toko*," "*spanduk toko*," "geosemiotics Bali signage," and "culinary signboards Indonesia." Duplicate handling used source URL, title, date, location, and deduplication key to prevent repeated counting of similar repository files or related pages.

Analysis was organized through three tools: a geosemiotic emplacement matrix, a multimodal typography and materiality audit, and linguistic hierarchy and identity coding. Coding first described visible evidence, then categorized it, and only then interpreted its theoretical meaning. This sequencing reduces over-interpretation and separates source description from researcher inference. The analytical framework draws on Indonesian linguistic landscape research and recent work on urban visual culture, street posters, and café or shop signs [33], [10], [11], [27]. No claim about consumer behavior, audience reception, or owner intention is made without visible or documentary evidence.

Table 2. Operational coding scheme

Analytical Tool	Main Variables	Evidence Base	Analytical Output	Validity Guardrail
Geosemiotic emplacement matrix	Placement, visibility, façade position, corridor density, official/commercial contrast	Primary visual items and context documents	Typology of urban visibility and sign emplacement	Do not infer owner intention without evidence
Multimodal typography and materiality audit	Letterform, colour, surface, layout, logo position, frame, material durability	Image descriptions, visual fields, screenshots, media stills	Typology of vernacular typographic and material aesthetics	Do not assign exact font names unless identifiable
Linguistic hierarchy and identity coding	Language, script, translation, code mixing, naming, identity marker, commercial function	Visible text, transcript fields, literature comparators	Map of language hierarchy, identity indexing, and commercial address	Do not infer class, ethnicity, or religion without visible evidence

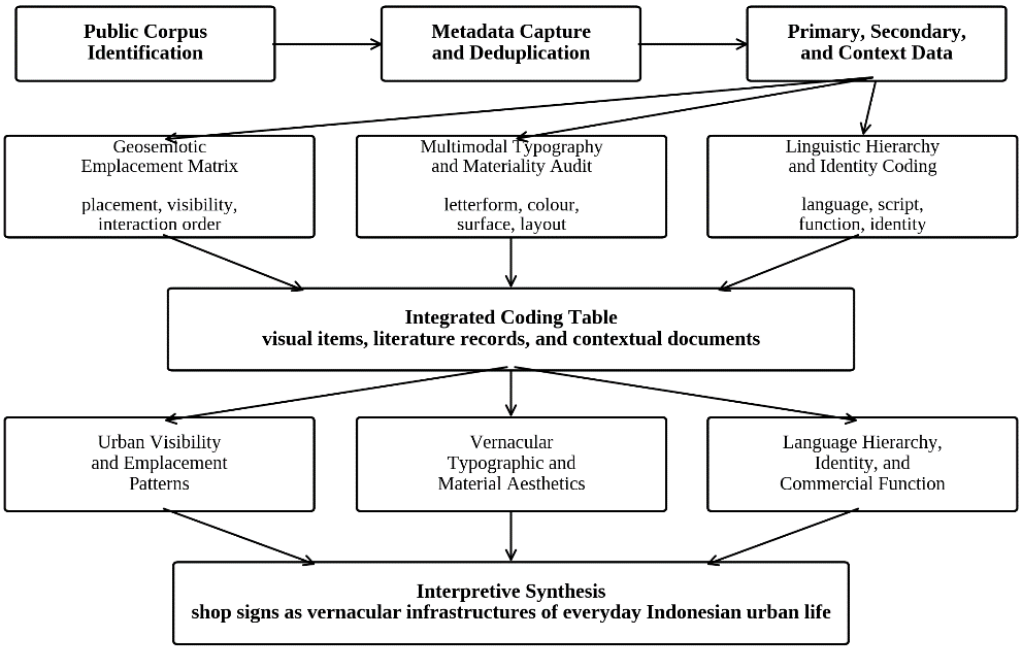


Figure 1. Operational matrix of analysis

4. RESULTS

4.1. Urban visibility and geosemiotic emplacement patterns

Urban visibility in the primary visual corpus is organized less by monumental signage than by ordinary commercial surfaces that make small-scale urban life readable. Table 3 shows that fixed shopfront naming forms the largest category, followed by roadside banners and temporary displays, while street-corridor typography, layered frontage, and mobile or market-adjacent signboards appear as smaller but analytically important patterns. This distribution is consistent with Indonesian linguistic landscape studies showing that commercial signs are central sites where language, economy, and urban identity intersect [1], [2], [3], [5]. The pattern suggests that vernacular urban semiosis is produced through repeated acts of naming, positioning, and visual address.

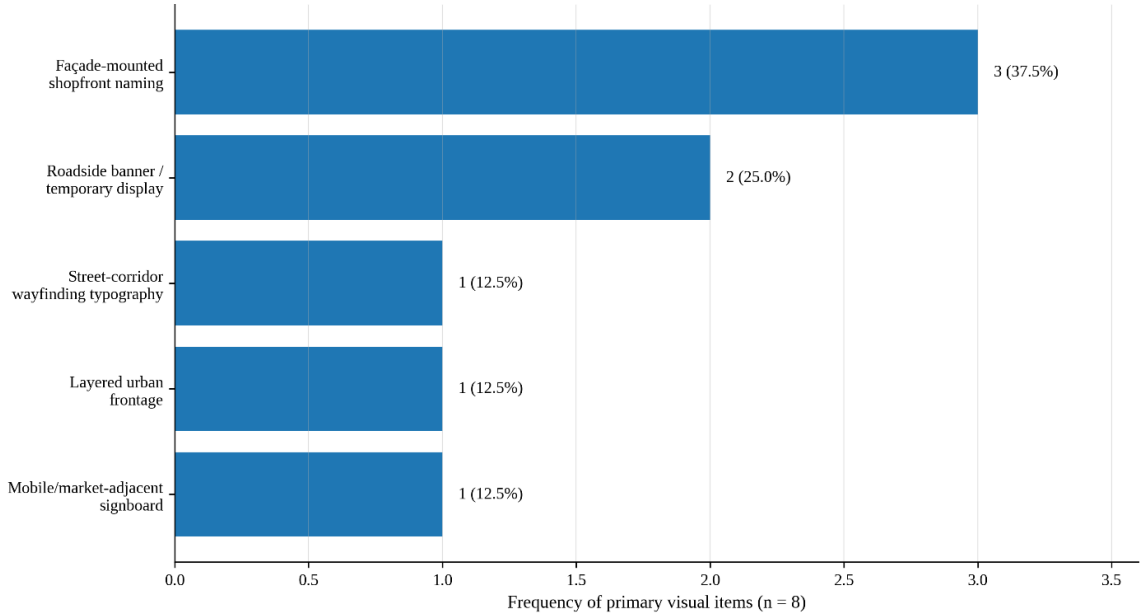


Figure 2. Urban visibility and geosemiotic emplacement patterns

The dominant pattern is façade-mounted shopfront naming, accounting for 37.5% of coded primary visual items. Signs such as “CV. GARUDA JAYA,” “Ubud Pharmacy,” and “Batagor Riri” indicate that business names are typically positioned as stable identity anchors: they identify a service, establish recognizability, and claim frontage in crowded urban space. Roadside banners and temporary displays form the second pattern at 25.0%, showing a different logic of visibility based on flexibility, low-cost materiality, and direct public address. Smaller categories remain significant because “Malioboro Street” shifts attention from commercial naming to urban orientation, while layered and mobile-adjacent signs show how signage becomes entangled with movement, media framing, and everyday street economies.

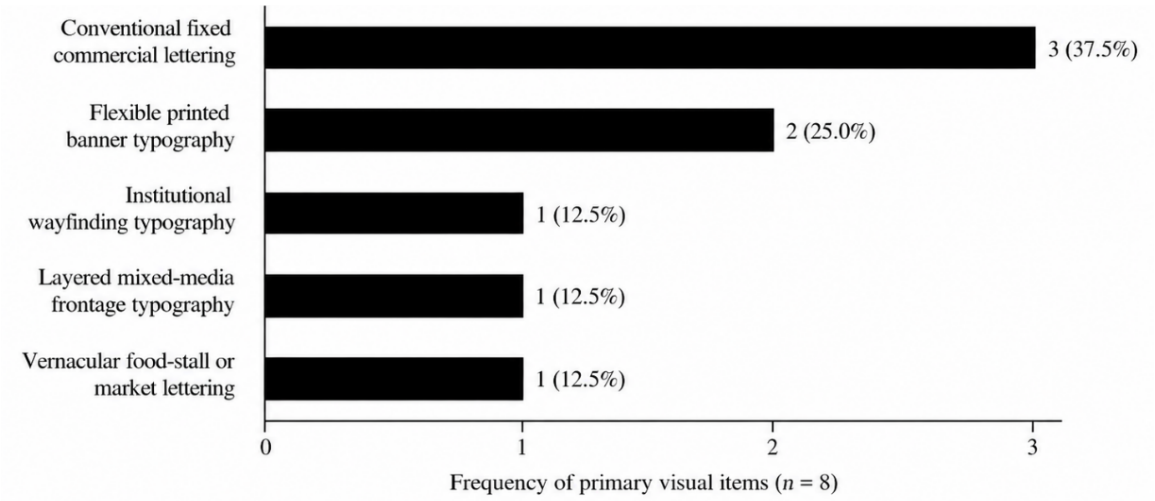
These patterns support a geosemiotic reading of shop signs as emplaced social objects rather than isolated written texts. Meaning is produced through where signs are placed, how long they are expected to last, what surfaces they occupy, and which publics they address. The prominence of façade-mounted signs indicates a search for commercial stability, while temporary banners suggest adaptive visibility within informal or semi-formal economies. This interpretation extends linguistic landscape research by treating typography, materiality, and placement as core evidence, not secondary decoration. In line with work on urban signage, street posters, café signs, and commercial landscapes [9], [10], [11], [27], this study positions vernacular signs as infrastructures of everyday urban legibility.

Table 3. Urban visibility and geosemiotic emplacement patterns

Main Analytical Category	Spatial Subcategory	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Visible Text / Visual Evidence	Data Codes	Analytical Note
Façade-mounted shopfront naming	Fixed frontage sign	Business name occupies the most visible façade position and functions as the primary marker of commercial identity	3	37.5%	Company sign, pharmacy sign, culinary outlet	"CV. GARUDA JAYA"; "Ubud Pharmacy"; "Batagor Riri"	PV001, PV002, PV003	Commercial identity is stabilized through frontal visibility and readable naming
Roadside banner and temporary display	Portable or semi-permanent street-facing surface	Printed or improvised surface addresses pedestrians, motorists, or nearby customers through practical visibility	2	25.0%	Retail banner, price/product display, service promotion	Roadside shop display; public-facing retail/service banner	PV007, PV008	Informal commercial visibility depends on mobility, affordability, and visual immediacy
Street-corridor wayfinding typography	Place-name and street-sign typography	Sign marks movement, orientation, and urban recognition rather than only commercial transaction	1	12.5%	Street-name sign, tourism corridor marker	"Malioboro Street"	PV006	Typography connects spatial navigation with urban memory and place branding
Layered urban frontage	Shopfront embedded in dense visual environment	Storefront sign competes with surrounding visual texts, façades, and public media framing	1	12.5%	Mediated storefront, overlapping urban visual field	Public media still of storefront signscape	PV005	Urban meaning emerges through visual layering rather than isolated sign reading
Mobile or market-adjacent signboard	Sign attached to temporary, small-scale, or mobile commerce	Sign operates near everyday circulation, food vending, or market-like street use	1	12.5%	Food-related or small-scale commercial display	Culinary/market-oriented signboard	PV004	Signage links commerce, mobility, and vernacular street economy

4.2. Vernacular typography and material aesthetics

Typography in the primary corpus functions as a visible technology of commercial recognition, not as a merely decorative layer of urban signage. Table 4 shows that conventional fixed commercial lettering accounts for the largest share of items, while flexible printed banner typography forms the second most frequent pattern. The remaining categories—wayfinding typography, layered frontage typography, and vernacular food-stall or market lettering—appear less frequently but clarify how typographic meaning changes across material surface and spatial use. This pattern aligns with studies of typographic landscapes, Indonesian product branding, Bali shopfront signage, and culinary signboards, which show that letterform, surface, colour, and layout participate in producing social meaning [9], [25], [5], [7].



Category	Frequency	Percentage
Conventional fixed commercial lettering	3	37.5%
Flexible printed banner typography	2	25.0%
Institutional wayfinding typography	1	12.5%
Layered mixed-media frontage typography	1	12.5%
Vernacular food-stall or market lettering	1	12.5%

Figure 3. Vernacular typography and material aesthetics

The dominant visual pattern is durable, frontal, commercially recognizable lettering, represented by items such as “CV. GARUDA JAYA,” “Ubud Pharmacy,” and “Batagor Riri.” These examples indicate that fixed commercial typography tends to stabilize identity: names are made legible, repeatable, and spatially anchored. Flexible banner typography, visible in PV007 and PV008, shows another logic: signs operate through affordability, replaceability, and immediate street-level address. The corpus also includes “Malioboro Street,” where typography is tied to public orientation rather than shop identity. Layered frontage and market-adjacent lettering show that type is often encountered within visual crowding, movement, and everyday commercial improvisation. The pattern is therefore not only about font appearance, but about how letterforms are materially placed.

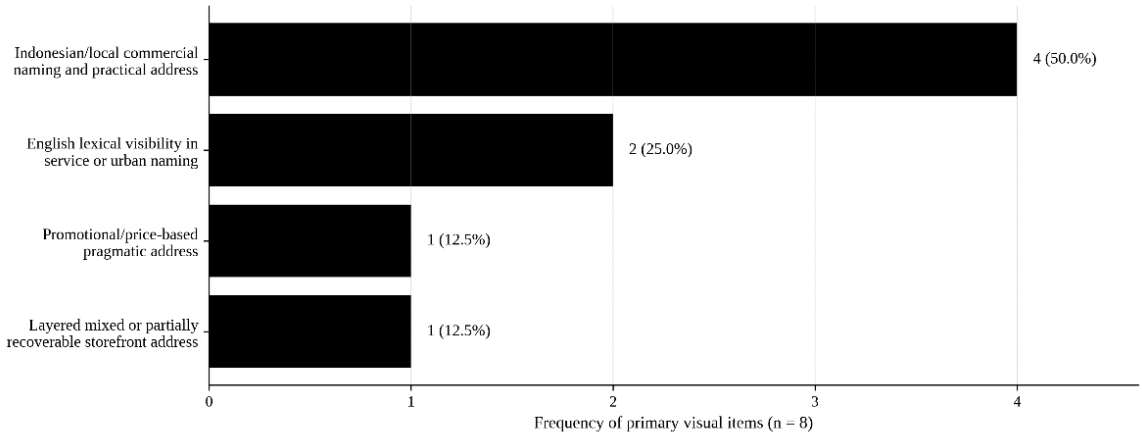
The distribution suggests that vernacular typography in Indonesian urban space works through a tension between stability and adaptability. Fixed signs seek permanence and credibility, while banners, market boards, and layered frontages respond to changing commercial needs and dense street conditions. This supports a multimodal semiotic reading in which typography becomes a social index of durability, informality, aspiration, and spatial negotiation. Rather than separating language from visual form, this study treats lettering, colour, surface, and layout as mutually constitutive elements of urban meaning. In conversation with recent work on street posters, café signs, commercial branding, and multimodal linguistic landscapes [10], [11], [27], [31], these findings position shop typography as an everyday grammar of Indonesian urban visibility.

Table 4. Vernacular typography and material aesthetics

Main Analytical Category	Typographic-Material Subcategory	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Visual and Material Variation	Visible Text / Visual Evidence	Data Codes	Analytical Note
Conventional fixed commercial lettering	Durable shopfront or façade-based lettering	Business name appears as a stable visual identity through readable, frontal, commercially recognizable type	3	37.5%	Company sign, pharmacy lettering, culinary outlet name	"CV. GARUDA JAYA"; "Ubud Pharmacy"; "Batagor Riri"	PV001, PV002, PV003	Typography supports trust, service identification, and fixed commercial presence
Flexible printed banner typography	Low-cost printed surface with promotional or practical street address	Text is designed for quick recognition from roadside or pedestrian movement	2	25.0%	Retail banner, service advertisement, product/price display	Roadside shop display; public-facing retail/service banner	PV007, PV008	Material flexibility indicates adaptive commercial visibility and everyday informality
Institutional wayfinding typography	Standardized place-name typography	Text prioritizes orientation, legibility, and spatial recognition over commercial persuasion	1	12.5%	Street-name sign and urban corridor marker	"Malioboro Street"	PV006	Typography connects public navigation with recognizable urban identity
Layered mixed-media frontage typography	Co-presence of signs, façades, media framing, and overlapping visual surfaces	Meaning depends on density, layering, and visual competition rather than a single sign	1	12.5%	Storefront sign embedded in broader urban visual field	Public media still of storefront signscape	PV005	Typography becomes part of a crowded urban surface where visibility is relational
Vernacular food-stall or market lettering	Small-scale commercial lettering near mobile, culinary, or market-oriented activity	Text functions as immediate identification in everyday circulation	1	12.5%	Food-related or small-scale signboard	Culinary/market-oriented signboard	PV004	Lettering indexes proximity, affordability, and vernacular street economy

4.3. Language hierarchy, identity, and commercial function

Language choice in the primary corpus shows that everyday Indonesian urban signage is shaped by a practical hierarchy of local legibility, selective English visibility, and immediate commercial address. The largest category consists of Indonesian or locally recognizable naming, while English appears in more specialized service and place-branding contexts. This pattern is consistent with Indonesian linguistic landscape research showing that public signs distribute languages according to commercial function, urban audience, and symbolic value rather than simple multilingual coexistence [1], [2], [4], [7]. The corpus therefore suggests that language hierarchy is produced through situated visibility: who must recognize the sign, where it appears, and what kind of urban trust it seeks to establish.



Language-Identity Configuration	Frequency	Percentage
Indonesian/local commercial naming and practical address	4	50.0%
English lexical visibility in service or urban naming	2	25.0%
Promotional/price-based pragmatic address	1	12.5%
Layered mixed or partially recoverable storefront address	1	12.5%

Figure 4. Language hierarchy, identity, and commercial function

The dominant pattern is Indonesian/local commercial naming and practical address, representing 50.0% of the primary visual items. “CV. GARUDA JAYA” projects formal business identity through an Indonesian corporate naming structure, while “Batagor Riri” anchors commercial recognition in a locally familiar culinary lexicon and personal-brand format. English appears in 25.0% of items through “Ubud Pharmacy” and “Malioboro Street,” where it supports service credibility, tourism readability, and spatial orientation. The remaining items foreground either direct promotional address or layered storefront visibility. This distribution indicates that English is not simply dominant or marginal; it is selectively deployed where professional, touristic, or orientational value is visually useful, while local and Indonesian forms remain central to everyday commercial recognition.

The pattern strengthens a semiotic interpretation of shop signs as instruments of urban belonging and commercial positioning. Indonesian and local expressions make signs socially immediate because they address routine urban users through familiar categories of trade, food, service, and place. English contributes another register: it can index professional service, mobility, tourism, and cosmopolitan aspiration without replacing local address. Layered storefront signs further show that linguistic hierarchy is never purely textual; it is mediated by façade density, visual competition, and material placement. This interpretation extends studies on commercial signage, tourism landscapes, and urban typography by arguing that language hierarchy in Indonesian shop signs emerges through the interaction of wording, placement, function, and public recognizability rather than language choice alone.

Table 5. Language hierarchy, identity, and commercial function

Main Analytical Category	Linguistic-Identity Subcategory	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Visible Text / Visual Evidence	Data Codes	Analytical Note
Indonesian/local commercial naming and practical address	Localized commercial identification	Indonesian, local lexical forms, or locally recognizable naming are used to identify everyday businesses	4	50.0%	Company sign, culinary naming, roadside retail display, market-oriented signboard	"CV. GARUDA JAYA"; "Batagor Riri"; roadside shop display; culinary/market-oriented signboard	PV001, PV003, PV004, PV007	Local legibility anchors commerce in familiar urban and culinary vocabularies
English lexical visibility in service or urban naming	Cosmopolitan service and place indexing	English appears in service naming or urban orientation, often linked to professional credibility or tourist readability	2	25.0%	Pharmacy sign, street-corridor wayfinding	"Ubud Pharmacy"; "Malioboro Street"	PV002, PV006	English operates as service marker and spatial-branding resource
Promotional/price-based pragmatic address	Direct commercial instruction or offer	Text foregrounds practical information, offer, product, service, or price-based visibility	1	12.5%	Public-facing retail/service banner	Retail/service promotional banner	PV008	Language is organized for immediate transactional recognition
Layered mixed or partially recoverable storefront address	Dense visual-commercial identity	Storefront meaning is produced through overlapping text, façade, media framing, and visual density	1	12.5%	Public media still of storefront signscape	Layered storefront signscape	PV005	Meaning depends on relational visibility rather than one fully isolated text

5. DISCUSSION

The prominence of façade-mounted shopfront naming indicates that everyday Indonesian commercial streets are organized through modest but durable acts of public identification. Its implication is not limited to business recognition; it shows how urban actors claim visibility, reliability, and spatial belonging through signs that are repeatedly encountered by pedestrians, motorists, and local customers. This finding extends Foster and Welsh's (2021) [1] account of language visibility on Balikpapan thoroughfares and Tamtomo and Goebel's (2022) [2] argument that Indonesian signage is dialogic rather than merely imitative of globalization. Yet this study also shifts emphasis from multilingual presence toward urban function: signs such as fixed company, pharmacy, and culinary names operate as small-scale infrastructures of orientation. Their function is productive because they make commerce legible; their dysfunction is that visibility becomes uneven, privileging businesses able to occupy stable façades while marginalizing more temporary or peripheral vendors.

This pattern can be explained by the spatial structure of Indonesian street commerce, where frontage functions as both address and advertisement. A façade sign is not simply attached to a building; it transforms a private commercial unit into a readable urban object. Geosemiotic studies in Bali and Malang show that emplacement gives signs their social force because placement mediates intended meaning, movement, and public interpretation [4], [5]. The current evidence follows this logic: signs gain authority when they are positioned frontally, made durable, and aligned with everyday circulation. However, this does not mean that façade signs cause commercial success. Rather, façade emplacement is associated with a recognizable form of urban legitimacy. This explains why fixed shopfront naming becomes dominant: it fits a city structure in which visibility, routinized movement, and commercial trust are mutually reinforcing.

The typographic and material pattern shows that vernacular urban design works through a tension between permanence and adaptability. Fixed lettering suggests credibility, while banners and improvised surfaces reveal how small businesses negotiate cost, mobility, and immediate recognition. This matters because typography is often treated as aesthetic embellishment, whereas the data show that letterform and surface are central to how commerce becomes socially readable. Chernyavskaya's (2022) [9] work on typographic landscape and Sari et al.'s (2022) [24] study of vernacular typography support this claim by showing that lettering carries sociolinguistic and cultural value. At the same time, this finding complicates studies that emphasize polished branding or tourism aesthetics, such as work on cafés, commercial branding, and destination signage [11], [28], [27]. Vernacular typography is not failed professional design; it is an adaptive urban grammar.

The underlying structure behind this typographic pattern lies in unequal access to durable materials, formal design resources, and stable commercial space. Banners, boards, wall paint, stickers, and temporary displays are not random visual choices; they are practical solutions to economic uncertainty and crowded streetscapes. Andron and Parkinson's (2025) [10] analysis of street posters is useful here because it shows that paper and temporary surfaces can actively produce urban visual culture rather than merely clutter it. Similarly, Benu et al. (2025) [7] demonstrate that culinary signboards in Kupang articulate identity through everyday commercial surfaces. Studies of commercialization among Indonesian micro and small enterprises, such as Fawaid and Abdullah's (2024) [34] work on halal certification among women-led MSMEs, are a reminder that small enterprises operate under unequal resource conditions, which is consistent with the material hierarchy of signs described here. The current findings support these arguments but place greater emphasis on material hierarchy: durability and flexibility index different relationships to urban risk. Fixed signs seek continuity, while temporary signs preserve responsiveness. This distinction explains why vernacular typography should be read through material conditions, not only through stylistic preference or visual taste.

The language hierarchy visible in the corpus suggests that Indonesian and locally recognizable forms remain central to everyday commercial address, while English appears selectively as a marker of service credibility, tourism readability, or urban orientation. This implication challenges simplified narratives in which English either dominates public space or merely represents external globalization. Instead, English functions situationally, while Indonesian and local lexical forms carry the burden of routine recognition. This finding supports studies showing that Indonesian linguistic landscapes distribute languages according to function, audience, and place rather than simple prestige ranking [3], [4], [16]. It also differs from cases where English-written signs strongly index elitism or cosmopolitan distinction, as reported in Kamalova's (2025) [11] work on coffee-shop neon signs. Here, English is present, but local legibility remains the organizing center.

This language pattern can be understood through the layered structure of Indonesian urban publics. Shop signs must address different audiences at once: local residents, passers-by, tourists, service users, and

mobile consumers. Indonesian and local naming forms work because they minimize interpretive distance in routine commercial encounters. English becomes useful when signs must signal professionalism, mobility, or tourist-facing recognition, as in "Ubud Pharmacy" or "Malioboro Street." This resonates with Tamtomo and Goebel's (2022) [2] view of globalization as dialogic rather than one-directional, and with Wang's (2025) [31] account of translanguaging and multimodality in community landscapes. Abdullah et al.'s (2025) [35] study of visual representation in the 2024 presidential campaign likewise treats visual form as a carrier of social meaning rather than ornament, although it addresses political rather than commercial display. However, this study adds that language hierarchy is not produced by wording alone. It emerges through the interaction of text, typography, placement, material condition, and commercial function. Indonesian vernacular city is therefore read not as a fixed linguistic order, but as a negotiated semiotic ecology.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian shop signs and street typography function as vernacular infrastructures through which everyday urban life becomes publicly legible. Its most important lesson is that ordinary commercial signs should not be reduced to linguistic display or branding ornament; they are spatial, material, and social practices that organize visibility, trust, locality, and commercial belonging. By combining linguistic landscape analysis, geosemiotics, and multimodal typography, this study renews the analytical perspective on Indonesian urban semiotics. Its contribution lies in foregrounding emplacement, material surface, lettering, and language hierarchy as interrelated variables for reading how cities are written through everyday signs.

This study remains limited by its reliance on publicly accessible visual materials and document-based interpretation, which restricts claims about sign-makers' intentions, audience reception, and long-term changes in urban signage. Its corpus also privileges visible commercial signs and does not fully capture hidden, temporary, erased, or rapidly changing street texts. Future research should therefore expand field-based documentation across multiple Indonesian cities, include interviews with shop owners, designers, residents, and pedestrians, and apply longitudinal visual mapping to examine how signs change over time. Comparative studies across metropolitan centers, small towns, tourism corridors, and peripheral urban areas would further clarify how vernacular typography mediates inequality, memory, mobility, and belonging.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks the reviewers and editorial team for their constructive feedback on this manuscript.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Author states no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nor Mohammad Abdoeh: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible visual materials (shop signs, banners, and street typography images), public scholarly literature, and official regulatory and repository documentation.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible images of urban shop signs and street typography, scholarly literature, and official signage-regulation documentation, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of publicly accessible visual items, secondary literature, and contextual documents analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

REFERENCES

[1] M. Foster and A. Welsh, "English usage in the linguistic landscape of Balikpapan's main thoroughfares," Indonesia and the Malay World, vol. 49, pp. 448-469, 2021, doi: 10.1080/13639811.2021.1959162.

[2] K. Tamtomo and Z. Goebel, "Dialogic landscapes: Toward a nuanced understanding of globalization in urban Indonesian signage," Journal of Sociolinguistics, 2022, doi: 10.1111/josl.12604.

[3] K. Artawa, I. Made, S. Paramarta, A. Mulyanah, D. Atmawati, I. K. Artawa, and K. Bawah, "Centripetal and centrifugal interconnection on hotel and restaurant linguistic landscape of Bali, Indonesia," Cogent Arts & Humanities, vol. 10, 2023, doi: 10.1080/23311983.2023.2218189.

[4] S. Ayyub and Z. Rohmah, "The linguistic landscape of Kotabaru Malang Train Station: Language representation in public space," Cogent Arts & Humanities, vol. 11, 2024, doi: 10.1080/23311983.2024.2389633.

[5] R. Setiarini, D. Khazanah, H. Sampurna, and S. Anam, "Geosemiotics in Bali linguistic landscape: Dissecting the intended meanings of the shopfront signages," Leksema: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, 2024, doi: 10.22515/ljbs.v9i2.9062.

[6] S. S. M. Azzahro, U. Permanaludin, and E. A. Ardiansyah, "Language contestation of tourism spots at Braga Street, Bandung: A linguistic landscape study," Humanus, 2025, doi: 10.24036/humanus.v24i1.132444.

[7] N. N. Benu, B. A. Sudarmanto, T. Wahyuni, D. Susilastri, E. Rosita, A. Mahmud, and S. Yono, "The culinary linguistic landscape of Kupang City, Indonesia: Unraveling identity through sign boards," Cogent Arts & Humanities, vol. 12, 2025, doi: 10.1080/23311983.2025.2449735.

[8] J. Androutsopoulos and A. Deumert, "Small shops in Hamburg and Cape Town," in Spaces of Multilingualism, 2021, doi: 10.4324/9781003125839-12.

[9] V. Chernyavskaya, "Typographic landscape in urban space: A sociolinguistic approach," Slovo.ru: Baltic Accent, 2022, doi: 10.5922/2225-5346-2022-4-5.

[10] S. Andron and C. Parkinson, "Power, paper, and profit: Street posters and the making of urban visual culture," Space and Culture, vol. 29, pp. 4-22, 2025, doi: 10.1177/12063312251367276.

[11] A. Kamalova, "Resemiotising globalisation and elitism: English-written neon signs in Kazakhstani coffee shops and on social media," International Journal of the Sociology of Language, vol. 2025, pp. 69-97, 2025, doi: 10.1515/ijsl-2024-0089.

[12] Y. Wirza, W. Gunawan, R. D. Muniroh, B. Hermawan, and A. Galihkusumah, "Translanguaging practices in the rural tourism linguistic landscape in showcasing cultural identity: An activity theory analysis," Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics, 2025, doi: 10.21462/ijefl.v10i1.903903.

[13] E. Andriyanti, "Social meanings in school linguistic landscape: A geosemiotic approach," KEMANUSIAAN: The Asian Journal of Humanities, 2021, doi: 10.21315/kajh2021.28.2.5.

[14] K. Nuswantara, H. Firdausiyah, Z. Rohmah, and D. N. Sholihah, "Multilingualism in Sunan Ampel Tomb Complex: A linguistic landscape study," Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities, 2021, doi: 10.15408/insaniyat.v6i1.21141.

[15] N. P. M. D. Pendit, A., and N. M. V. Utami, "Linguistic landscape of Malukat Temple in Gianyar, Bali: Analysis on public signage," KEMBARA Journal of Scientific Language Literature and Teaching, 2024, doi: 10.22219/kembara.v10i1.32669.

[16] Y. Mubarok, D. Sudana, Z. Nurhuda, and D. Yanti, "Linguistic landscape in the tourist area, Lembang Bandung, Indonesia," World Journal of English Language, 2024, doi: 10.5430/wjel.v14n2p230.

[17] B. A. Sudarmanto, N. N. Benu, T. Wahyuni, E. N. W. Aji, N. Kurnia, A. Mulyanah, A. Purba, S. Djuwarijah, I. Istiana, and R. E. Utami, "Language preservation through public signage: Analyzing the linguistic landscape of the Indonesia-Timor Leste border," Forum for Linguistic Studies, 2025, doi: 10.30564/fls.v7i4.9052.

[18] S. A. Nenotek, I. M. S. Paramarta, A. E. Sjioen, N. Beeh, A. R. Cornelis, and N. N. Benu, "The linguistic landscape for sustainable and inclusive tourism: Insight from Timor Tengah Selatan, Indonesia," Cogent Arts & Humanities, vol. 12, 2024, doi: 10.1080/23311983.2024.2441579.

[19] J. Chen and W. Hu, "Geo-semiotic analysis of shared streets in urban historical districts: The case of Jiefangbei, Chongqing, China," Land, 2024, doi: 10.3390/land13081232.

[20] S. Li, "Walking on Huaihai Street: Liminality, linguistic landscape, and language policy," Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, vol. 46, pp. 2807-2824, 2024, doi: 10.1080/01434632.2024.2309916.

[21] A. N. Eliza, D. A. Hadiutomo, and E. Faiza, "A linguistic landscape study in Kya Kya Surabaya, Indonesia," ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 2025, doi: 10.34050/els-jish.v8i1.42833.

[22] H. Firdausiyah and S. Suhandano, "Exploring languages in the linguistic landscape of Bandar Grissee," Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics, 2025, doi: 10.21462/ijefl.v10i1.897.

[23] M. F. Qulub and I. Khasanah, "Semiotic analysis of linguistic landscapes: Arabic language phenomena in Malang City public space," El-Jaudah: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Arab, 2024, doi: 10.56874/ej.v5i1.1580.

[24] N. L. D. I. D. Sari, I. Mudra, and N. K. P. Sarjani, "Vernacular typography design of bamboo keben craft as an opportunity of creating digital typeface," Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education, 2022, doi: 10.15294/harmonia.v22i1.34861.

[25] D. Lestariningsih, R. M. Sihombing, I. Okitasari, N. N. Alaini, A. Wardhani, and E. Budihastuti, "Multimodal linguistic landscape in Lombok: A case study of product branding," Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2023, doi: 10.17507/tpls.1312.31.

[26] A. Papadima and E. Kourdis, "Semiotic modes in local gastronomic discourse: A comparative analysis of culinary shop signs in Greece and Cyprus," Language and Semiotic Studies, vol. 8, pp. 1-32, 2022, doi: 10.1515/lass-2022-080201.

[27] Y. Song, ""Coffee is no bitter than work": Linguistic landscapes in urban cafés in China," Applied Linguistics Review, vol. 17, pp. 537-571, 2025, doi: 10.1515/applirev-2024-0380.

[28] R. Purnamasari and D. Affandi, "Visual branding strategies in Indonesian coffee shops and street food vendors: A semiotic and thematic analysis," Co-Value Jurnal Ekonomi Koperasi dan Kewirausahaan, 2025, doi: 10.59188/covalue.v15i8.5226.

[29] M. Denil, W. Simpen, I. N. Suparwa, A. Agung, P. Putra, N., and M. Suryati, "The motif of language dominance that used on coffee shop signboards in Padang City," Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal, 2024, doi: 10.47175/rielsj.v5i2.982.

[30] I. S. Budi, G. Ayu, N. Launingtia, P. D. Merlyna, Y. Pramesti, and U. Ganesha, "Linguistic landscape analysis of commercial space: A case study of Tokio barber shop signage in Bali and Bing Pop restaurant signage in literacy and learning perspective," Journal of Practice Learning and Educational Development, 2025, doi: 10.58737/jpled.v5i3.526.

[31] J. Wang, "Translanguaging and multimodality in the linguistic landscape of a Chinese community in Johor Bahru, Malaysia," International Journal of Multilingualism, vol. 23, pp. 189-203, 2025, doi: 10.1080/14790718.2025.2517341.

[32] X. Wang, Y. Gao, F. Sun, and Q. Wang, "A linguistic landscape study of shop signs on Barkhor Street in Lhasa," International Journal of Multilingualism, vol. 22, pp. 1980-2005, 2024, doi: 10.1080/14790718.2024.2373770.

[33] K. Gonçalves and T. M. Milani, "Street art/art in the street: Semiotics, politics, economy," Social Semiotics, vol. 32, pp. 425-443, 2022, doi: 10.1080/10350330.2022.2114724.

[34] A. Fawaid and A. Abdullah, "Desa cerdas ramah gender: Analisis penerapan sertifikasi halal dan komersialisasi produk bagi pelaku UMKM perempuan," *Lab*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 116-142, 2024, doi: 10.33507/lab.v8i02.2463.

[35] I. Abdullah, D. Afriadi, M. Yusuf, M. Susanto, and A. Fawaid, "The optics of leadership: Visual representation in the 2024 Indonesian presidential campaign," *Visual Review. International Visual Culture Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 133-145, 2025, doi: 10.62161/revvisual.v17.5273.

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Nor Mohammad Abdoeh is affiliated with Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Salatiga, Indonesia, where his work engages linguistic landscape studies, geosemiotics, and the sociolinguistics of urban public space. His current research examines how shop signs, street typography, and vernacular commercial lettering across Indonesian cities encode language hierarchy, material improvisation, and everyday spatial identity, combining geosemiotic emplacement analysis with multimodal typography and materiality audits. He can be contacted at email: abduhiainsalatiga@gmail.com