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Sacred words in secular spaces: calligraphy, ornament, and the negotiation of religious visibility in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sacred words increasingly appear beyond explicitly religious architecture in Indonesia, where Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornament circulate across homes, textiles, heritage sites, commercial interiors, and digital design environments. **Objective:** This study examines how sacred script negotiates religious visibility in secular and semi-secular Indonesian spaces through spatial placement, material translation, and social framing. **Method:** This study employs qualitative multimodal corpus analysis of 31 verified public, scholarly, and contextual items, coded through spatial visibility analysis, ornament-material semiotic coding, and a religious visibility negotiation matrix. **Results:** Sacred architectural settings remain important anchors of devotional meaning, but calligraphy also moves into domestic, textile, commercial, heritage, and hybrid cultural spaces. Its material transformation shows that sacred words become socially mobile when translated into architectural surfaces, batik motifs, framed décor, craft objects, and digital-commercial graphics. Its visibility is negotiated through devotional anchoring, heritage-cultural legitimation, aesthetic domestication, commercial commodification, intercultural mediation, and ambiguous public display. **Implication:** These findings indicate that religious visibility in Indonesia is produced through design-mediated accommodation rather than simple opposition between sacred and secular space. **Novelty:** This study contributes a multimodal account of calligraphy as negotiated visual infrastructure that connects Islamic aesthetics, linguistic landscapes, material culture, and secular-facing public space.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia offers a particularly consequential site for examining how sacred writing circulates beyond explicitly sacred architecture. With a population of 270.20 million recorded in Indonesia's 2020 Population Census [1], religious expression is not confined to ritual institutions but is embedded in dense everyday environments where homes, markets, streets, heritage buildings, schools, and commercial interiors become visible fields of belief, taste, and identity. Indonesia's public life is also structured by officially recognized religious diversity, as state religious administration extends recognition and support to Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Within this context, Arabic calligraphy occupies a distinctive position: it carries scriptural authority while also functioning as ornament, commodity, cultural memory, and spatial marker. Its appearance in secular or semi-secular spaces raises a crucial problem: how can sacred words remain religiously legible while becoming acceptable, decorative, and socially negotiable in plural public environments?

Existing literature has established important foundations for addressing this problem, but it remains unevenly developed. Studies of Indonesian linguistic landscapes and visual space have shown how signage, typography, murals, and urban texts organize visibility, belonging, and inequality [2], [3], [4], [5]. Research on Islamic calligraphy and architecture has examined placement principles, mosque decoration, Qur'anic reception, and identity formation in sacred buildings [6], [7], [8], [9]. Other studies demonstrate that Indonesian Islamic aesthetics are historically hybrid, incorporating Javanese, Chinese, pre-Islamic, and local ornamental traditions [10], [11], [12], [13]. Yet these strands rarely meet. What remains insufficiently examined is how calligraphy operates when relocated from mosques and manuscripts into cafés, domestic interiors, tourism venues, batik, heritage displays, commercial décor, and civic spaces where sacredness must be visually negotiated rather than institutionally guaranteed.

This study addresses that gap by asking how Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornament negotiate religious visibility in Indonesian secular and semi-secular spaces. More specifically, this study examines three questions. First, how are sacred words spatially positioned when they appear outside formally religious settings? Second, what visual and material strategies allow calligraphy to shift between religious sign, aesthetic ornament, cultural heritage, and commercial object? Third, how do these arrangements mediate the tension between pious visibility, public acceptability, and plural spatial belonging? Methodologically, this study approaches calligraphy not only as readable text but also as multimodal form: its meaning is shaped through placement, scale, material, colour, framing, script style, accompanying ornament, and surrounding spatial context. This approach extends linguistic landscape analysis by treating sacred script as both language and visual infrastructure, while also extending Islamic aesthetics scholarship beyond mosque-centred interpretation toward everyday and hybrid spatial practices.

The central argument advanced here is that sacred words in secular Indonesian spaces do not simply lose religious meaning, nor do they remain unchanged as devotional inscriptions. Rather, their visibility is negotiated through design. Calligraphy becomes socially mobile when it is aestheticized, domesticated, hybridized with local motifs, or embedded within commercial and cultural atmospheres. This does not imply secularization as disappearance of religion; instead, it suggests what Van Der Tol and Gorski (2022) [14] describe as fragmentation and relocation of sacred space, where sacredness is redistributed across ordinary environments. In Indonesia, such redistribution is mediated by visual convention, religious moderation, market aesthetics, and cultural translation. Popular preaching and Islamic counter-public visibility also show that religious forms can circulate through persuasive, mediated, and affective modes rather than formal authority alone [15]. This study therefore argues that calligraphy functions as a negotiated visual grammar through which religion becomes publicly visible without always becoming institutionally dominant.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sacred writing

Sacred writing in visual space is not reducible to religious text; it is a materialized form of authority, memory, aesthetics, and social placement. In Islamic traditions, Arabic calligraphy is often understood as the visual embodiment of Qur'anic reverence, devotional discipline, and sacred beauty, yet Indonesian contexts complicate this definition because calligraphy also enters vernacular art, architecture, textile production, domestic decoration, and commercial display. Studies on mosque calligraphy emphasize liturgical meaning, scriptural reception, and architectural placement [9], [6], [7], [8], while cultural studies foreground adaptation, hybridity, and social taste [11], [16]. This divergence shows that sacred script must be read simultaneously as text, ornament, and spatial practice.

The analytical dimensions of sacred writing therefore include textual content, script style, placement, materiality, scale, and audience orientation. Placement studies argue that calligraphy acquires meaning through architectural hierarchy, visibility, orientation, and relation to worship practices [6], [7], [8], A. Wulanda and Jamil (2024). Indonesian studies add that ornament is also shaped by local craft traditions, from mosque domes and carved surfaces to batik and domestic display [17], [18], [19]. Such indicators shift attention from what sacred words say to how they become visible, legible, decorative, and socially acceptable in particular environments.

2.2. Religious visibility

Religious visibility refers to the public appearance of religious signs, practices, and identities within shared social space. It differs from private belief because it concerns how religion becomes perceptible, contested, normalized, or aestheticized before heterogeneous audiences. Van Der Tol and Gorski (2022) [14] understand secularization not simply as religious decline but as fragmentation and relocation of sacred space, a useful lens for examining sacred inscriptions outside mosques. In Indonesia, religious visibility also intersects with preaching, public persuasion, and Islamic counter-public formation [15], while debates over

halal symbols and religious branding reveal how visual religion circulates through media, markets, and ideology [20].

Indicators of religious visibility include explicit sacred language, degree of visual prominence, institutional anchoring, spatial accessibility, and interpretive ambiguity. A Qur'anic phrase placed in a mosque wall is institutionally secured, but a calligraphic panel in a café, hotel, living room, batik motif, or tourism venue requires more negotiation. Studies of domestic calligraphy show that Arabic script may operate as piety, protection, prestige, or interior taste [21], [16]. Research on Muslim family language practices and Arabic learning among non-Muslim students further shows that Arabic and Islamic markers may move across identity boundaries without producing a single meaning [22], [23].

2.3. Ornament and spatial semiotics

Ornament and spatial semiotics provide a third lens because sacred words become socially meaningful through design relations rather than textual content alone. Linguistic landscape studies conceptualize public writing as a spatial arrangement of visibility, power, belonging, and inequality [2], [4], [5]. Urban visual discourse studies extend this by treating murals, graffiti, typography, and public art as semiotic systems that organize memory and identity [3], Hapsari (2026), [24]. However, these studies often focus on language, politics, or urban identity, while Islamic calligraphy scholarship often remains attached to sacred architecture. This separation limits understanding of sacred ornament in mixed social spaces.

The key indicators of ornamented spatial semiotics are hybridity, framing, colour, motif combination, material surface, circulation medium, and relation to local identity. Indonesian Islamic aesthetics has long combined Arabic script with Javanese, Hindu-Buddhist, Chinese, Malay, Banjar, and regional visual traditions [10], [25], [12], [13]. Lasem batik, Besurek motifs, mosque ornaments, and palace-influenced craft reveal that calligraphy can operate as sacred reminder, cultural heritage, and visual commodity at once [11], [17], [26]. This study therefore positions calligraphy as negotiated visual grammar: sacred words become public not only by being displayed, but by being designed into acceptable spatial forms.

3. METHOD

This study uses visible sacred script and Islamic ornament as its material unit of analysis. Each corpus item represents one verified public instance, scholarly case, or contextual document in which Arabic calligraphy, Islamic ornament, or related sacred visual vocabulary appears in Indonesian spatial, domestic, cultural, commercial, or heritage settings. The corpus contains 31 retained items: 7 primary public-source objects, 18 secondary scholarly sources, and 6 contextual references. This composition allows this study to compare sacred architectural baselines with secular and semi-secular environments without claiming statistical representativeness. The analytical unit is therefore not a population sample, but a curated multimodal corpus for interpretive pattern analysis.

This study adopts a qualitative multimodal corpus design. Such a design is appropriate because calligraphy in secular space cannot be interpreted only through textual meaning; it must be read through placement, material, colour, framing, motif combination, source context, and expected audience. This study therefore combines linguistic-landscape analysis with Islamic aesthetic analysis and spatial semiotics. Aini (2026) [2], Sartono (2026) [3], Sain and Assya'bani (2026) [4], and Kartika (2026) [5] support the treatment of visible language as spatial evidence, while Baydoun et al. (2024) [6], [7], Dariyadi et al. (2025) [8], and Fawaid and Sultoni (2022) [9] provide categories for reading calligraphic placement and sacred visual form.

Table 1. Corpus composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Period	Number	Characteristics
PRI-001	Primary	Kemenparekraf tourism article	2021–2026	1	Batik Besurek; calligraphy as textile and tourism-cultural object
PRI-002–PRI-003	Primary	Indonesia Kaya heritage portal	2021–2026	2	Pilgrimage, mosque heritage, Islamic ornament, Arabic-Chinese visual mixture
PRI-004	Primary	Demak Regency tourism office	2021–2026	1	Historic mosque as public heritage node
PRI-005–PRI-006	Primary	Canva Indonesia and Shopee Indonesia	2026	2	Calligraphy templates and commercial décor circulation
PRI-007	Primary	BBKB Kemenperin	2021–2026	1	Batik motif and symbolic craft vocabulary
SEC-001, SEC-014–SEC-016	Secondary	Journal articles	2022–2025	4	Mosque calligraphy, Qur'anic reception, placement principles, Islamic design
SEC-002–SEC-003	Secondary	Journal articles	2021–2025	2	Domestic heritage and home calligraphy decoration
SEC-004, SEC-009–SEC-010	Secondary	Proceedings/journal articles	2022–2026	3	Textile, craft economy, middle-class calligraphy consumption
SEC-005–SEC-008	Secondary	Journal/proceedings articles	2021–2025	4	Inculturation, palace ornament, interfaith symbolism, architectural hybridity
SEC-011–SEC-012	Secondary	Journal articles	2025	2	Arabic visibility, identity, and cross-religious language boundaries
SEC-013, SEC-017–SEC-018	Secondary	Journal/indexed records	2023–2025	3	Calligraphy history, style reception, and script transmission
CON-001–CON-006	Context	UNESCO, design media, theory, local linguistic-landscape references	2009–2026	6	Heritage, sacred-space theory, visual language, and design context

Information was drawn from public, verifiable, and legally accessible sources. Primary data came from official tourism, heritage, craft, and digital-commercial platforms that display or describe calligraphic and ornamental objects. Secondary data came from peer-reviewed articles, proceedings, indexed journal records, and open academic pages dealing with mosque decoration, domestic calligraphy, batik, palace ornament, Islamic architecture, Arabic identity, and calligraphic transmission. Contextual data were used only to refine conceptual framing and did not replace primary or secondary corpus evidence. This separation prevents this study from treating background theory, public documentation, and empirical visual objects as equivalent forms of evidence.

Data collection proceeded through five stages. First, searches used Indonesian and English keywords such as "Arabic calligraphy Indonesia," "*kaligrafi dekorasi rumah*," "*ornamen Islam ruang publik*," "*Batik Besurek kaligrafi*," "*kaligrafi masjid Indonesia*," "Yogyakarta Palace Arabic calligraphy," and "religious visibility public space." Second, each candidate item was screened for public accessibility, relevance to sacred script or Islamic ornament, and Indonesian spatial connection. Third, metadata were recorded, including title, source, date, region, object type, URL or DOI, source category, and verification note. Fourth, duplicate items were removed through title-source-location matching. Fifth, visual and textual descriptors were stored for subsequent coding.

Data analysis followed three linked procedures. First, spatial visibility analysis examined where sacred script appeared, how prominently it was positioned, and whether space was religious, domestic, commercial, cultural, digital, or ambiguous. Second, ornament-material semiotic coding examined script style, motif integration, colour, surface, medium, and relation to local visual traditions. Third, a religious visibility negotiation matrix assessed whether calligraphy functioned primarily as devotional sign, heritage marker, identity claim, commercial object, or aesthetic décor. This procedure supports interpretive comparison across corpus layers while avoiding causal inference. Claims are therefore limited to patterned meanings observable within this documented corpus.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Spatial relocation of sacred script across secular and semi-public environments

Sacred script appears most strongly in architectural and heritage-oriented settings, but its movement into domestic, textile, commercial, and hybrid cultural contexts shows that religious visibility is not confined to mosque space. The corpus distribution identifies sacred architectural baselines as the largest category, with 7 items or 22.6%, followed by textile and craft translation and heritage-tourism display, each with 5 items or 16.1%. Domestic decoration, commercial-digital circulation, and hybrid ornament each account for 4 items or 12.9%. This pattern matters because calligraphy remains connected to devotional authority while simultaneously entering everyday and market-facing environments. Studies of calligraphic placement in Islamic architecture and Indonesian mosque decoration provide the baseline, whereas research on batik, home decoration, palace ornament, and linguistic landscapes clarifies how sacred script travels across space.

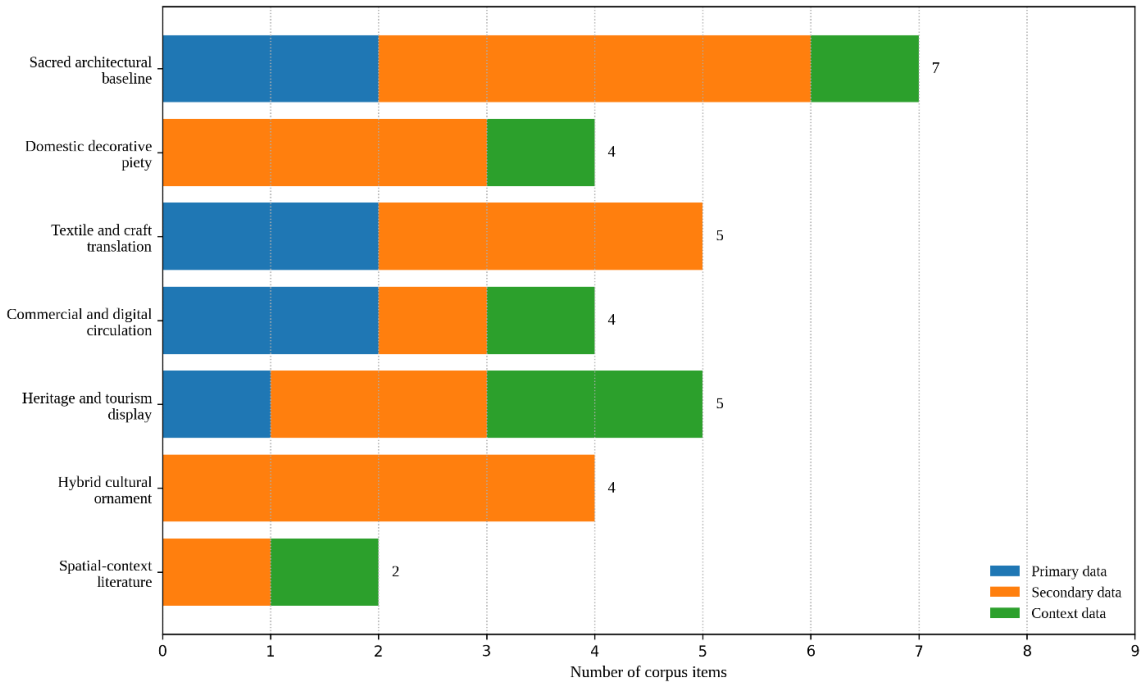


Figure 1. Spatial relocation of sacred script across corpus types

The dominant pattern is spatial redistribution rather than simple religious transfer. In sacred architectural items, corpus traces such as “Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration” and “aesthetics and reception of the Qur’an” position script within worship-oriented visual order. In contrast, textile and craft items use phrases such as “Batik Besurek” and “Lasem’s Batik Revival through Arabic Calligraphy and Chinese Sinography,” indicating that sacred writing can become portable cultural surface rather than fixed architectural inscription. Domestic and commercial items further shift calligraphy into display, consumption, and interior taste, as seen in “Javanese People’s Acceptance of Arabic Calligraphy as Home Decoration” and corpus traces on calligraphy products. Objectively, the corpus shows that sacred words remain visible, but their spatial function changes with location, material, and audience.

This distribution supports an interpretation of calligraphy as negotiated visual grammar. Sacred words do not disappear when placed in secular or semi-secular environments; instead, their authority is moderated through design, materiality, and spatial framing. Baydoun et al. [6], [7] and Dariyadi et al. [8] help explain how placement secures devotional meaning in mosque architecture, while Aryani [11], Mayasari [17], Awaliyah [12], Idham [10], and Heldiansyah et al. [13] show that Indonesian Islamic aesthetics is historically adaptive and locally hybrid. Van Der Tol and Gorski’s account [14] of sacred-space fragmentation is useful here because visibility is redistributed across domestic, commercial, and cultural settings rather than being confined to institutional religion. This study therefore reads calligraphy as a spatial mediator between piety, ornament, heritage, and public acceptability.

Table 2. Spatial visibility pattern of sacred script and Islamic ornament

Main Category	Spatial Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Primary Data	Secondary Data	Context Data	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Corpus Trace	Data Code
Sacred architectural baseline	Mosque, historic religious building, sacred-public heritage	Calligraphy remains tied to worship, Qur'anic reception, architectural hierarchy, and religious orientation	2	4	1	7	22.6%	Mosque wall, dome, mihrab zone, heritage mosque, sacred façade	"Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration"; "aesthetics and reception of the Qur'an"	PRI-003; PRI-004; SEC-001; SEC-014; SEC-015
Domestic decorative piety	House interior, framed wall object, family display	Sacred script enters private space as protection, taste, piety, and identity marker	0	3	1	4	12.9%	Living room display, home decoration, middle-class calligraphy product	"Javanese People's Acceptance of Arabic Calligraphy as Home Decoration"	SEC-002; SEC-010; CON-004
Textile and craft translation	Batik, motif design, craft surface, ornamented material	Sacred writing becomes pattern, regional identity, and portable cultural form	2	3	0	5	16.1%	Besurek textile, Lasem batik, calligraphic motif redesign, craft object	"Batik Besurek"; "Lasem's Batik Revival through Arabic Calligraphy and Chinese Sinography"	PRI-001; PRI-007; SEC-004; SEC-009
Commercial and digital circulation	Online template, marketplace décor, commercial interior, design platform	Calligraphy circulates as purchasable visual atmosphere and customizable aesthetic object	2	1	1	4	12.9%	Digital template, marketplace product, decorative wall art, commercial visual asset	"*produk kaligrafi*"; template-based calligraphy design	PRI-005; PRI-006; SEC-010; CON-005
Heritage and tourism display	Cultural destination, palace, public heritage narrative	Sacred script is framed as memory, tradition, architectural attraction, and cultural legitimacy	1	2	2	5	16.1%	Keraton ornament, mosque tourism, pilgrimage site, heritage portal description	"The Symbols of Inculturation and Interfaith in Demak's Great Mosque"	PRI-002; PRI-003; SEC-005; SEC-006; CON-001
Hybrid cultural ornament	Javanese, Chinese, Hindu-Buddhist, Banjar, palace, and regional motifs	Islamic script is combined with local visual vocabularies and non-Arab ornamental systems	0	4	0	4	12.9%	Chinese ornament, Javanese mosque, Banjar house, pre-Islamic motif continuity	"Chinese ornaments"; "Javanese Islamic architecture"; "Calligraphy Ornaments as Islamic Identity"	SEC-003; SEC-006; SEC-007; SEC-008
Spatial-context literature	Linguistic landscape, sacred-space theory, public visibility scholarship	Religious visibility is interpreted through public writing, spatial belonging, and fragmented sacredness	0	1	1	2	6.5%	Urban visual language, sacred-space fragmentation, public semiotics	"secularisation as fragmentation of sacred space"; "linguistic landscapes"	SEC-018; CON-006

4.2. Ornament, materiality, and media translation of sacred words

The corpus shows that calligraphy becomes analytically meaningful not only through where it appears, but through the material systems that carry it. Scriptural inscription and calligraphic placement form the largest category, with 7 items or 22.6%, followed by ornamented architectural surface with 6 items or 19.4%. Textile-craft translation and hybrid intercultural motif systems each contain 5 items or 16.1%, while domestic objectification and digital-commercial graphic circulation each contain 3 items or 9.7%. The same 31 corpus units used in the spatial analysis are retained here, but recoded through material and semiotic features. This preserves consistency while shifting analytical emphasis from spatial relocation to visual transformation

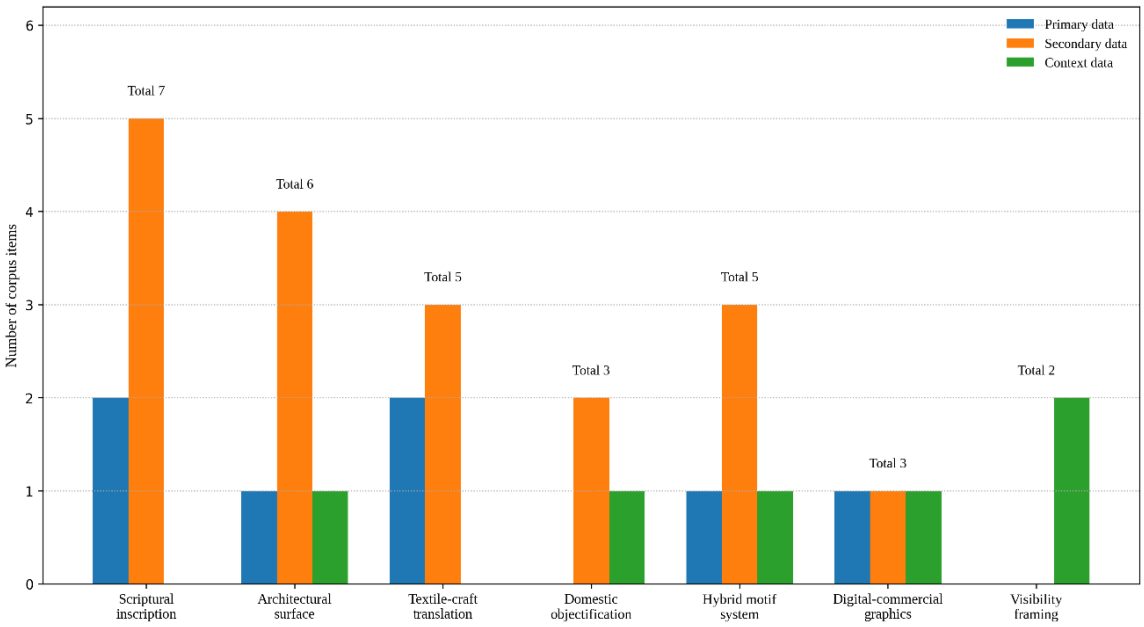


Figure 2. Ornament, materiality, and media translation of sacred words

The dominant pattern is a movement from inscription to surface, motif, and commodity. Corpus traces such as "Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration," "spiritual analysis of *basmalah*," and "aesthetics and reception of the Qur'an" indicate objects where sacred words remain textually explicit and religiously anchored. By contrast, "Batik Besurek," "Lasem's Batik Revival through Arabic Calligraphy and Chinese Sinography," and "calligraphy-rafflesia motif" show sacred script becoming repeatable ornament and regional craft language. Domestic and digital items further alter its status through framed display, template use, and product circulation. The pattern is therefore not a linear decline of sacred meaning, but a redistribution of calligraphy across different material intensities, from scriptural legibility to decorative abstraction.

The material pattern clarifies how religious visibility becomes acceptable in mixed environments. Baydoun et al. [6], [7] and Dariyadi et al. [8] explain why placement, hierarchy, and architectural order matter for calligraphic authority, but Indonesian evidence extends this logic into textile, heritage, domestic, and commercial surfaces. Aryani [11], Mayasari [17], Idham [10], Awaliyah [12], and Heldiansyah et al. [13] demonstrate that local visual traditions do not simply dilute Islamic meaning; they provide culturally intelligible forms through which sacred script can travel. This is why calligraphy may remain recognizably Islamic while also becoming batik motif, household décor, palace ornament, or digital commodity. This study therefore treats materiality as a mediating grammar that translates sacred language into socially mobile visual form.

Table 3. Ornament-material semiotic pattern across the same corpus

Main Category	Material / Media Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Primary Data	Secondary Data	Context Data	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Corpus Trace	Data Code
Scriptural inscription and calligraphic placement	Qur'anic phrase, *basmalah*, divine name, mosque inscription	Sacred words remain textually recognizable and visually ordered through religious placement	2	5	0	7	22.6%	Mosque wall, dome, mihrab-related inscription, calligraphic panel, Qur'anic reception	"Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration"; "spiritual analysis of *basmalah*"; "aesthetics and reception of the Qur'an"	PRI-003; PRI-004; SEC-001; SEC-014; SEC-015; SEC-017
Ornamented architectural surface	Façade, dome, carved wall, palace element, mosque ornament	Calligraphy and ornament become part of architectural skin and spatial hierarchy	1	4	1	6	19.4%	Dome ornament, carved surface, palace façade, mosque architectural detail	"calligraphy placement in Islamic public buildings"; "Islamic aesthetics in carvings"	PRI-002; SEC-006; SEC-007; SEC-008; SEC-016; CON-001
Textile and craft translation	Batik, cloth motif, craft object, redesigned ornament	Sacred script is translated into repeatable motif, regional craft identity, and portable surface	2	3	0	5	16.1%	Batik Besurek, Lasem batik, calligraphy-rafflesia motif, craft-based Islamic art	"Batik Besurek"; "Lasem's Batik Revival through Arabic Calligraphy and Chinese Sinography"	PRI-001; PRI-007; SEC-004; SEC-009; SEC-013
Domestic objectification	Home décor, framed calligraphy, interior visual product	Sacred writing becomes an object of taste, protection, prestige, and household piety	0	2	1	3	9.7%	Living-room display, framed wall object, middle-class calligraphy product	"Javanese People's Acceptance of Arabic Calligraphy as Home Decoration"; "*produk kaligrafi*"	SEC-002; SEC-010; CON-004
Hybrid intercultural motif system	Javanese, Chinese, Hindu-Buddhist, Banjar, regional ornament	Sacred script is visually negotiated through non-Arab and local symbolic vocabularies	1	3	1	5	16.1%	Chinese ornament, Javanese Islamic architecture, Banjar house, palace craft, pre-Islamic motif continuity	"Chinese ornaments"; "Javanese Islamic architecture"; "Calligraphy Ornaments as Islamic Identity"	PRI-002; SEC-003; SEC-006; SEC-008; CON-002
Digital-commercial graphic circulation	Template, marketplace image, brandable graphic object	Calligraphy becomes scalable, purchasable, and editable visual atmosphere	1	1	1	3	9.7%	Design template, marketplace décor, product catalogue, decorative graphic asset	"template-based calligraphy design"; "calligraphy product industry"	PRI-005; PRI-006; SEC-010
Conceptual and spatial visibility framing	Theory, linguistic landscape, secular-sacred space literature	Sacred words are interpreted through public visibility, spatial belonging, and fragmented sacredness	0	0	2	2	6.5%	Religious visibility, linguistic landscape, sacred-space relocation, public semiotics	"secularisation as fragmentation of sacred space"; "linguistic landscapes and signage"	CON-005; CON-006

4.3. Negotiating religious visibility, public acceptability, and ambiguous secularity

Religious visibility in this corpus is negotiated through several overlapping modes rather than through a simple opposition between sacred and secular. Heritage-cultural legitimation forms the largest category, with 8 items or 25.8%, followed by devotional anchoring with 7 items or 22.6%. Intercultural mediation accounts for 5 items or 16.1%, while aesthetic domestication and commercial commodification each contain 4 items or 12.9%. Ambiguous public visibility appears in 3 items or 9.7%. These values retain the same 31 corpus units used in previous analyses, but classify them by social function rather than spatial location or material form. This distribution shows that sacred script becomes publicly mobile through multiple forms of negotiation.

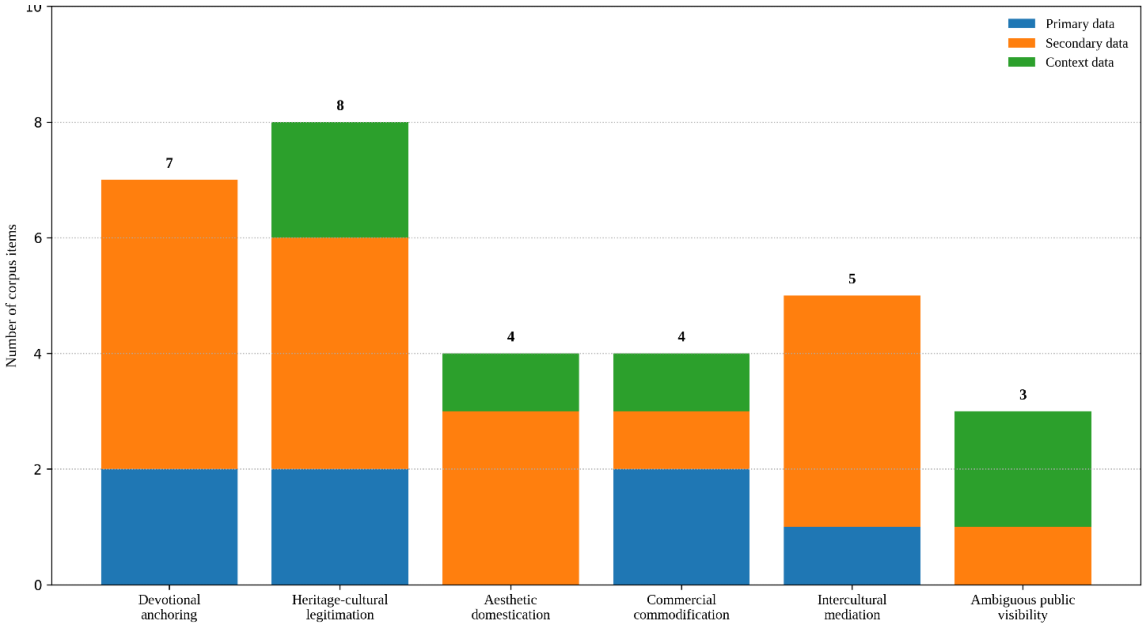


Figure 3. Religious visibility negotiation across corpus types

The dominant pattern is the movement from religious anchoring toward cultural and public acceptability. Corpus traces such as "Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration," "spiritual analysis of *basmalah*," and "aesthetics and reception of the Qur'an" keep calligraphy within explicitly devotional meaning. Yet items such as "Batik Besurek," "Symbols of Inculturation and Interfaith," and "Royal Carriage as Cultural Identity" show that sacred script is also made acceptable through heritage, regional memory, and cultural legitimacy. Domestic and commercial items then reposition calligraphy as décor, product, or lifestyle atmosphere. The corpus therefore suggests that sacred words remain religiously recognizable, but their social reception depends on how they are framed, displayed, and connected to non-devotional meanings.

This pattern strengthens an argument that religious visibility in Indonesian visual culture is produced through calibrated design rather than mere display. Van Der Tol and Gorski's concept [14] of fragmented sacred space helps explain why sacredness can appear outside formally religious buildings without losing all religious force. Weng's discussion [15] of mediated Islamic persuasion also clarifies how religious signs can circulate through aesthetic and affective modes rather than institutional command. At the Indonesian level, Idham [10], Awaliyah [12], Aryani [11], Heldiansyah et al. [13], and Mayasari [17] show that local ornament does not simply secularize Islamic script; it gives sacred language culturally intelligible routes into plural space. This study therefore positions calligraphy as a mediator of piety, heritage, market visibility, and negotiated public belonging.

Table 4. Religious visibility negotiation across the same corpus

Main Category	Negotiation Mode	Analytical Indicator	Primary Data	Secondary Data	Context Data	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Corpus Trace	Data Code
Devotional anchoring	Sacred meaning remains explicit	Calligraphy is tied to Qur'anic phrases, mosque placement, *basmalah*, divine names, or worship-oriented architecture	2	5	0	7	22.6%	Mosque inscription, dome ornament, sacred wall panel, Qur'anic reception, *basmalah* analysis	"Arabic calligraphy as mosque decoration"; "spiritual analysis of *basmalah*"; "aesthetics and reception of the Qur'an"	PRI-003; PRI-004; SEC-001; SEC-014; SEC-015; SEC-017
Heritage-cultural legitimation	Sacred script is reframed as cultural memory	Calligraphy becomes part of heritage narration, tourism display, palace ornament, regional history, or craft identity	2	4	2	8	25.8%	Demak heritage, Cirebon palace ornament, mosque tourism, Batik Besurek, Lasem batik, heritage portal narration	"Batik Besurek"; "Symbols of Inculturation and Interfaith"; "Royal Carriage as Cultural Identity"	PRI-001; PRI-002; PRI-004; SEC-004; SEC-005; SEC-006
Aesthetic domestication	Sacred script is softened into interior taste	Religious inscription becomes decorative object, household sign, wall display, or middle-class lifestyle product	0	3	1	4	12.9%	Framed calligraphy, domestic wall art, home protection symbol, prestige object, interior atmosphere	"Javanese People's Acceptance of Arabic Calligraphy as Home Decoration"; "*produk kaligrafi*"	SEC-002; SEC-010; CON-004
Commercial commodification	Calligraphy becomes purchasable visual asset	Sacred words circulate through templates, marketplace décor, product catalogue, hospitality aesthetics, or consumer display	2	1	1	4	12.9%	Digital design template, online marketplace item, calligraphy product, commercial decorative asset	"template-based calligraphy design"; "calligraphy product industry"	PRI-005; PRI-006; SEC-010; CON-005
Intercultural mediation	Islamic script is adjusted through local visual vocabularies	Arabic calligraphy is combined with Chinese, Javanese, Hindu-Buddhist, Banjar, or regional motifs to broaden cultural acceptability	1	4	0	5	16.1%	Chinese ornament, Javanese mosque form, Banjar house, palace craft, pre-Islamic motif continuity	"Chinese ornaments"; "Javanese Islamic architecture"; "Calligraphy Ornaments as Islamic Identity"	PRI-002; SEC-003; SEC-006; SEC-007; SEC-008
Ambiguous public visibility	Sacredness is present but not institutionally fixed	Calligraphy is interpreted through public semiotics, fragmented sacred space, religious moderation, or linguistic-landscape visibility	0	1	2	3	9.7%	Semi-public display, secular-sacred overlap, public writing, spatial belonging, religious visibility theory	"secularisation as fragmentation of sacred space"; "linguistic landscapes and signage"	SEC-018; CON-005; CON-006

5. DISCUSSION

The spatial distribution of sacred script matters because it shows that Arabic calligraphy in Indonesia functions less as a fixed religious sign than as a mobile visual practice. Its concentration in sacred architectural baselines confirms that mosques and heritage religious buildings remain authoritative sites of calligraphic meaning, yet its presence in domestic, textile, commercial, and tourism contexts indicates that sacred visibility is no longer secured only by worship space. This has two implications. Functionally, calligraphy enables religious identity to remain publicly perceptible while being adapted to plural everyday settings. Dysfunctionally, such mobility can blur boundaries between reverence, taste, commodity, and heritage branding. This finding extends Baydoun et al. (2024) [6], [7], Dariyadi et al. (2025) [8], and Fawaid and Sultoni (2022) [9], who emphasize architectural and devotional placement, by showing that spatial relocation produces a broader public grammar of sacred visibility. It also aligns with Aini (2026) [2] and Sartono (2026) [3], who treat visible language as spatial belonging rather than neutral decoration.

This spatial mobility is not accidental; it reflects an underlying structure in which Indonesian religious visibility is mediated by architectural authority, cultural inheritance, and everyday consumption. The association between mosque-based items and devotional anchoring suggests that institutional religious space still stabilizes scriptural meaning. However, the spread of calligraphy into batik, home interiors, commercial templates, and heritage destinations suggests a different structure: sacred script becomes acceptable when it is attached to recognizable cultural or aesthetic frames. This does not establish a causal pathway, but it indicates a patterned relation between spatial context and interpretive flexibility. Van Der Tol and Gorski's (2022) [14] argument that sacred space becomes fragmented rather than simply erased helps explain this pattern. Sacredness is redistributed across ordinary environments through visual conventions that make religious signs legible without requiring ritual setting. In this sense, Indonesian calligraphy occupies a middle zone between religious authority and civic-cultural accommodation.

The material transformation of calligraphy has a distinct implication: sacred words become socially durable when they can be translated into surface, motif, craft, and object. The data showed that scriptural inscription and architectural surface remain prominent, but textile-craft translation and hybrid motif systems are also substantial. This means calligraphy's public life depends not only on semantic readability but also on material adaptability. When Arabic script appears in Batik Besurek, Lasem batik, framed home décor, or digital templates, it becomes a carrier of religious memory, regional identity, and aesthetic value at once. This supports Aryani (2022) [11], Mayasari (2021) [17], and Maryanto (2026) [16], who show that calligraphy participates in craft revival, design innovation, and middle-class consumption. Yet this also complicates studies that approach calligraphy primarily as devotional inscription. Material circulation may preserve sacred recognizability, but it can also detach sacred language from textual comprehension, ritual discipline, or theological depth. Fawaid et al.'s (2019) [27] study of mosque architecture in Java is a reminder that sacred forms are routinely renegotiated between religious meaning and political or cultural claims.

The reason materiality has such interpretive force lies in the semiotic structure of ornament itself. Ornament does not merely decorate meaning already present in script; it reorganizes how that meaning is encountered. Architectural calligraphy draws authority from verticality, scale, placement, and sacred orientation, as Baydoun et al. (2024) [6], [7] and Dariyadi et al. (2025) [8] suggest. Textile and craft calligraphy, by contrast, works through repetition, portability, pattern, and tactile circulation. Domestic calligraphy works through intimacy, protection, and taste, while digital-commercial graphics work through scalability and consumption. These modes do not cause identical readings, but they condition different interpretive possibilities. Idham (2021) [10], Awaliyah (2024) [12], Lee-Niinioja (2022) [25], and Heldiansyah et al. (2025) [13] show that Indonesian Islamic aesthetics has long depended on adaptation across Javanese, Chinese, Banjar, Hindu-Buddhist, and regional visual forms. This helps explain why material hybridity does not necessarily weaken religious visibility; it often supplies the cultural grammar through which sacred words become locally intelligible. Fawaid et al.'s (2024) [28] discussion of Javanese Islamic aesthetics supports this reading by treating aesthetic form as part of how Islam is locally and politically articulated.

The strongest implication of the negotiation pattern is that religious visibility in Indonesian visual culture is neither simply assertive nor merely decorative. Heritage-cultural legitimation and devotional anchoring were the most prominent modes, while intercultural mediation, aesthetic domestication, commercial commodification, and ambiguous public visibility formed secondary but significant patterns. This suggests that calligraphy works as a mediator among piety, heritage, social acceptability, and market aesthetics. Its function is to make religion visible without always presenting it as institutional authority. At the same time, this negotiation contains a potential dysfunction: sacred words may become culturally admired while their ethical, scriptural, or devotional force is selectively softened. This finding supports

Weng's (2022) [15] argument that Islamic visibility often circulates through persuasive and mediated forms, but it differs from accounts of religious branding such as Saidi and Sazali (2024) [20] by showing that not all public religious signs operate through ideological contestation; some operate through accommodation, ambience, and cultural translation.

The underlying structure of this negotiation is Indonesia's plural visual environment, where religious signs must be recognizable enough to carry sacred value but flexible enough to coexist with heterogeneous audiences. This explains why calligraphy is frequently stabilized through heritage, craft, local ornament, or interior aesthetics. Such forms reduce the risk of overt spatial dominance while preserving Islamic recognizability. The pattern does not prove that design causes public acceptance, but it shows a structural association between visual moderation and spatial mobility. Nasution et al. (2025) [23] and Ilma and Rohmah (2024) [22] are useful here because they show that Arabic and Islamic markers may cross religious, educational, and family boundaries without producing a single identity meaning. Similarly, linguistic-landscape scholarship by Sain and Assya'bani (2026) [4], Aini (2026) [2], and Kartika (2026) [5] clarifies that visibility is always relational: signs gain force through placement, audience, and competing scripts. This study therefore contributes a theory of sacred words as negotiated visual infrastructure in secular-facing Indonesian spaces.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornament in Indonesia do not operate only as devotional inscriptions attached to sacred architecture; they also function as mobile visual practices that negotiate piety, heritage, taste, commerce, and public acceptability across secular and semi-secular spaces. Its central lesson is that sacred words become socially durable when they are spatially relocated, materially translated, and visually moderated without fully losing religious recognizability. The main contribution lies in renewing linguistic-landscape and Islamic-aesthetics scholarship by treating calligraphy as both readable text and designed visual infrastructure, while its methodological strength rests on a multimodal corpus that links space, materiality, and visibility negotiation.

This study remains limited by its reliance on publicly available visual and textual materials, which restricts access to audience reception, designer intention, and situated interpretation in everyday encounters. Its qualitative corpus also supports patterned interpretation rather than statistical generalization or causal explanation. Future research should therefore combine multimodal corpus analysis with ethnographic observation, interviews with designers, religious authorities, consumers, and space users, and comparative analysis across Indonesian regions and religious communities. Further studies may also examine digital platforms, marketplace circulation, and algorithmic image production to understand how sacred calligraphy is increasingly commodified, circulated, and recontextualized in contemporary visual culture.

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Noval Maliki: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

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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 calligraphic and ornamental items drawn from official tourism, heritage, and craft sources, and peer-reviewed scholarly documentation.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible visual and textual materials, tourism and heritage sources, and scholarly literature on Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornament in Indonesia, 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 calligraphic and ornamental items, secondary literature, and contextual documents analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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