

Visual discourse of urban space: a semiotic analysis of street art and linguistic graffiti in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

Background: Jakarta's urban landscape has evolved into a contested discursive space where street art, graffiti, and murals serve as multimodal forms of social commentary, identity expression, and political resistance. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how signs, symbols, spatial placement, and layered authorship in Jakarta's street art construct and negotiate urban narratives. **Method:** Using a qualitative multimodal approach—integrating Semiotic Analysis, Visual Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis—the research analyzes purposively sampled artworks documented through fieldwork, community archives, and digital platforms. **Results:** The findings reveal three core patterns: first, minimalist monochromatic murals function as coded endurance strategies under conditions of censorship; second, infrastructural murals on flyovers reframe utilitarian structures as civic discourse platforms; third, layered graffiti walls operate as participatory archives, allowing marginalized voices to engage in iterative public dialogue. Collectively, these patterns demonstrate how Jakarta's street art simultaneously embodies resilience, cultural memory, and political agency. **Implication:** The implications underscore the need to recognize street art as a critical urban semiotic infrastructure, informing both scholarly discourse and inclusive cultural policy. **Novelty:** This study demonstrates how multimodal street art practices transform urban space into a dynamic discursive arena where resilience, collective memory, and political agency are continuously negotiated through visual and spatial meaning-making.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jakarta's walls, flyovers, and back alleys have become a dense interface between citizens and the city, where images and words compete with billboards, CCTV, and redevelopment signage. The proliferation of murals, tags, and stencils articulates everyday claims over space amid privatization, securitization, and uneven modernization. In districts undergoing transit-led renewal or touristification, fresh paint often arrives with displacement anxieties; in kampung corridors, hand-cut stencils warn, mock, or mobilize. These artifacts matter because they convert abstract debates—who belongs, who decides, who benefits—into legible street-level discourse. Linguistic graffiti in slang, code-switches, and local idioms anchors arguments in situated vernaculars, while visual motifs—eyes, skulls, clenched fists—circulate memetically across neighborhoods and platforms. The urgency of this study lies in documenting how visual-linguistic practices narrate justice, precarity, and identity under conditions of surveillance and gentrification. In short, Jakarta's street art is not décor; it is a contested semiotic infrastructure through which urban publics negotiate power.

Scholarship has mapped street art's aesthetics and politics in Latin America, Europe, and North America, tracing semiotics [1], multimodal visual grammar [2], and urban rights [3]. Critical discourse analysis [4] and studies of linguistic landscapes [5] show how text in public space indexes ideology, mobility, and belonging. Indonesian research has examined heritage murals, tourism branding, and protest art in episodic moments [6], [7], [8], yet often isolates either image or text, or treats Jakarta as a backdrop rather than an active discursive actor. What remains underexplored is an integrated account that combines semiotic analysis, visual discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis to read images, words, and emplacement together. Equally underexamined are the circulations between on-site artifacts and their platformed afterlives (Instagram, community archives, Street View) that extend the city's discursive reach. This study addresses those gaps with a Jakarta-centered, multimodal, spatially sensitive approach.

This research asks: (1) What denotative and connotative meanings do recurrent signs, colors, icons, and slang in Jakarta's graffiti and murals mobilize, and to what effect? (2) How do specific urban sites—flyover pillars, marketplace shutters, cultural precinct walls—frame and transform these meanings as visual discourse? (3) In what ways do these visual-linguistic practices articulate resistance, negotiate marginalization, or assemble counterpublics in relation to policing, redevelopment, and everyday governance? To answer, we build a corpus from field documentation and public platforms (e.g., @streetartjakarta), reading representative items (“*Rebut Ruang!*”, “*Jakarta Milik Siapa?*”, skull-and-warning stencils) through Barthesian semiotics, VDA of layout and emplacement, and CDA of ideological positioning. By aligning micro-features (lexicon, iconography) with meso-level spatial staging and macro-level political economy, the study clarifies how Jakarta's walls function as discursive canvases that mediate struggles over visibility, legitimacy, and urban citizenship.

Provisionally, this study argues that Jakarta's street art constitutes a vernacular counter-archive that re-scales citizenship from policy to pavement. Semiotic strategies—metonymic references to surveillance, skeletal memento mori, red-black palettes of urgency—work with linguistic play (slang, code-mixing, rhetorical questions) to produce affective claims on space. Spatially, siting under flyovers and at cultural landmarks refracts messages through flows of commuters and tourists, amplifying legibility and contestation. Discursively, these artifacts do not merely oppose authority; they choreograph negotiations with enforcement, real estate, and platform algorithms, revealing a pragmatic politics of presence. If substantiated, the implication is twofold: analytically, urban research must integrate image, text, and emplacement to theorize public voice; civically, policy that treats street art solely as vandalism misses its diagnostic value for equity and participation. Thus, the study tests a claim that Jakarta's visual discourse is both critique and proposition: a situated demand to “reclaim room” in the city.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Semiotics in street art

Semiotics, as articulated by Ferdinand de Saussure and later expanded by Roland Barthes, is the study of signs and signification, providing a lens to interpret meaning-making in visual culture [9]. In the context of street art, semiotics examines how images, colors, symbols, and linguistic elements function as signifiers, carrying denotative meanings (literal depiction) and connotative meanings (cultural, ideological interpretations) [10]. While Saussure's structural approach focuses on the binary relationship between signifier and signified, Barthes emphasizes the layered polysemy of signs within socio-political contexts. Scholars diverge in defining street art semiotics: some treat graffiti purely as an artistic practice with aesthetic codes [11], while others frame it as a politically charged semiotic system embedded in urban struggles [1]. This study adopts Barthes' expanded notion, viewing Jakarta's graffiti not as isolated artworks but as socially situated texts whose meanings are negotiated between creators, audiences, and urban environments.

Semiotic analysis of street art generally identifies three interlinked categories: iconography, color symbolism, and textual-linguistic elements. Iconography refers to the recurring images—eyes, clenched fists, skulls—that serve as visual shorthand for broader narratives such as surveillance, resistance, or mortality [12]. Color symbolism relates to the cultural associations of hues: red as urgency or defiance, black as mourning or rebellion, and bright palettes as irony or subversion [13]. Textual-linguistic elements encompass slang, bilingual code-switching, and rhetorical questions (“*Jakarta Milik Siapa?*”) that anchor meaning in local sociolinguistic realities. Studies of urban graffiti in Latin America and Southeast Asia [8], [11], [14], [15] suggest these categories rarely operate in isolation; rather, their interplay constructs layered interpretations. In Jakarta, the co-occurrence of iconography and vernacular slogans heightens both immediacy and political resonance, inviting readings that are culturally specific yet globally legible.

2.2. Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA)

Visual Discourse Analysis extends beyond semiotics by examining how images, spatial arrangements, and compositional structures function within broader social narratives [1]. Unlike semiotics, which isolates sign systems, VDA situates visual texts in discursive practices—how they interact with urban space, audience positioning, and media circulation. Definitions vary: some researchers frame VDA as a methodology to decode multimodal texts' communicative strategies [16], [17], while others see it as an ethnographic engagement with visual-material culture [14], [18]. In the study of street art, VDA highlights how placement—on a flyover pillar, in a marketplace alley—affects meaning-making, shaping the visibility, accessibility, and interpretive context of an artwork. By foregrounding spatiality, VDA allows researchers to understand murals and graffiti as active participants in shaping urban discourse rather than as passive visual artifacts.

VDA research often classifies analytical focus into three dimensions: compositional meaning, spatial framing, and audience interaction. Compositional meaning analyzes the formal arrangement of elements—balance, salience, vectors—that guide interpretation [19]. Spatial framing concerns how physical context (e.g., walls near transport hubs, cultural heritage zones) influences reception and reframes the artwork's discursive intent [11]. Audience interaction examines how viewers engage with, photograph, and share street art, extending its life into digital domains [20]. For Jakarta, these categories are crucial: a mural at Kota Tua draws tourists who recontextualize it as heritage branding, whereas the same design under a highway overpass may be read as activist intervention. Such distinctions reveal how VDA uncovers the dynamic interplay between visual content, urban spatiality, and social circulation.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis, developed prominently by Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, investigates the relationship between discourse and power [4], [21], [22], focusing on how language and semiotic practices reproduce or challenge social inequalities. CDA's application to visual culture recognizes that images, like words, are embedded in ideological structures and serve as instruments of hegemony or resistance [23]. While some scholars limit CDA to verbal texts, others advocate for multimodal CDA, integrating linguistic, visual, and spatial modes [24]. In street art studies, CDA reveals how graffiti articulates oppositional voices, exposes marginalization, and contests dominant narratives. Interpretations diverge: some view graffiti as symbolic resistance with limited material impact [25], while others see it as an active mode of counterpublic discourse [26]. This study adopts the latter perspective, framing Jakarta's street art as an insurgent semiotic practice with tangible implications for urban citizenship.

CDA typically engages three analytical dimensions: discourse-as-text, discourse-as-discursive-practice, and discourse-as-social-practice [4]. Discourse-as-text examines the specific linguistic and visual features—lexical choices, metaphor, symbolism—that construct meaning. Discourse-as-discursive-practice focuses on production, distribution, and consumption: who creates the graffiti, how it circulates, and how it is interpreted across communities [21]. Discourse-as-social-practice situates these acts within broader socio-political contexts, linking them to issues of governance, economic restructuring, and identity politics. In Jakarta's case, a stencil declaring "Rebut Ruang!" operates textually as a directive, discursively as a viral slogan in activist networks, and socially as a challenge to gentrification policies. These categories make CDA a powerful tool for unpacking the layered political work of street art, revealing how visual-linguistic interventions both reflect and reshape the city's contested public sphere.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this research comprises visual and linguistic artifacts of Jakarta's street art, including graffiti, murals, stencils, and other wall-based interventions that integrate textual and symbolic elements. These are treated as material objects situated in public urban spaces, each bearing both a physical presence and a semiotic function. The focus is on artworks that demonstrate intentional social commentary, identity expression, or political engagement through the interplay of imagery, typography, and spatial context. Selection is guided by representativeness in thematic diversity (e.g., protest, cultural heritage, urban identity) and geographical spread across key Jakarta districts. By cataloguing these artifacts, the study aims to ensure analytical coherence while acknowledging the heterogeneity of street art forms. Table 1 summarizes the key attributes of the unit of analysis.

This study employs a qualitative research design using a multimodal discourse analysis approach, integrating semiotics, Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The qualitative paradigm is chosen because it prioritizes depth of interpretation over quantification, allowing the researcher to engage with the nuanced meanings embedded in both visual and textual elements [27]. A multimodal approach is especially pertinent as street art exists at the intersection of linguistic and non-linguistic communication, often embedded in specific socio-spatial contexts. The design is exploratory-descriptive, aiming to capture emergent themes and interpretive patterns without pre-imposing rigid

analytical categories. This study situates visual texts in their spatial and social environments, enabling a layered reading that accounts for symbolic content, spatial emplacement, and ideological framing. This approach aligns with urban semiotics literature, which emphasizes the co-production of meaning between signs and the cityscape.

Table 1. Unit analysis of research

Category	Examples	Source Location / Medium
Graffiti slogans	“Rebut Ruang!” “Jakarta Milik Siapa?”	Flyovers, cultural districts, market alleys
Thematic murals	“Keadilan Sosial” (Kota Tua) COVID-19 mural (Slipi)	Heritage zones, community walls
Stencil art	Skull + “Awasi Polisi”	Residential alleys, commercial backstreets
Poster/sticker art	Anti-eviction posters with local dialect	Transit hubs, shopfront shutters

This research draws on three primary sources of information: (1) field documentation of Jakarta street art conducted by the researcher; (2) archival material from online platforms such as Instagram (@streetartjakarta, @jakartamural), Google Street View, and community mural documentation initiatives like JKT StreetArt and Lifepatch; and (3) secondary literature from scholarly journals, books, and urban studies reports. Field documentation ensures contemporaneity and site-specific context, while online sources allow for temporal breadth and capture of artworks that may have since been removed or altered—a common occurrence in ephemeral street art culture [28]. The inclusion of community archives acknowledges the role of local actors in curating and preserving street art narratives. Triangulating these sources enhances validity by cross-verifying visual data, textual inscriptions, and location-specific information, ensuring that the analysis rests on a robust and contextually grounded dataset.

Data collection follows a multi-stage process. First, purposive sampling identifies urban zones with known concentrations of street art, such as Kota Tua, Blok M, Slipi, and underpass areas. Second, field visits are conducted to photograph and geotag artworks, noting contextual details such as surrounding architecture, pedestrian flow, and neighborhood characteristics. This is supplemented by systematic online searches of relevant hashtags and geolocations on Instagram and Google Street View, enabling the retrieval of temporally dispersed or geographically inaccessible works. Third, metadata is recorded for each artifact, including date, location, medium, dominant colors, language(s) used, and thematic tags. Ethical considerations include avoiding any disclosure that could endanger the anonymity of artists, especially where messages are politically sensitive [29]. This systematic yet adaptive process ensures the dataset captures both the spatial diversity and thematic richness of Jakarta’s visual-linguistic urban discourse.

Data analysis proceeds in three sequential but interrelated stages corresponding to the chosen analytical lenses. First, Semiotic Analysis identifies denotative and connotative meanings of visual and textual signs, with attention to recurring motifs, color symbolism, and linguistic forms. Second, Visual Discourse Analysis examines spatial placement, compositional structures, and audience positioning, exploring how location and visual design interact to produce meaning. Third, Critical Discourse Analysis interrogates the ideological dimensions of the works, linking them to broader socio-political contexts such as gentrification, surveillance, and civic participation. Coding is conducted iteratively, beginning with open coding to capture emergent themes, followed by axial coding to refine categories across the three lenses. Triangulation between analytical frameworks strengthens interpretive validity, ensuring that findings reflect not only the micro-level features of the artworks but also their macro-level urban and political significance.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Signs and symbols in Jakarta’s street art

The monochromatic mural, rendered in expressive curved lines and intricate forms, features stylized figures that merge human and abstract elements. As shown in Figure 1, it appears in an unpolished urban corner—possibly reflecting marginalized or underserved neighborhoods. The high-contrast black and white palette draws attention to form over color, while organic shapes evoke both human forms and metaphoric expressions of containment or tension. The choice of style and setting suggests deliberate semiotic messaging, likely aligned with countercultural or underground discourses. Such visuals resonate with semiotic scholarship emphasizing how minimalist or monochrome forms can amplify symbolic messaging by stripping away distractions and focusing interpretive energies on form, motif, and embodied meaning [15], [30], [31], [32]. These signs suggest a communicative strategy focused on urgency, anonymity, and evocative symbolism.



Figure 1. A monochromatic mural with stylized, organic forms—exemplifies symbolic motifs located in marginal urban zones.

The mural's composition relies on repetition of curved, fibrous shapes that interlock across the wall, producing both visual rhythm and density. There are no explicit text elements—interpretation hinges solely on visual form. The monochromatic palette strips the mural to signifying structures: dominantly black silhouettes outlined against white. The organic, almost totemic shapes suggest bodily presence, but abstracted, enabling multiple inferences: skeletal forms, interwoven communities, or spatial entrapment. The lack of vibrant color or textual anchoring shifts the viewer's focus to ambiguity and interpretation. The mural's site—rough, uncurated—reinforces a sense of informal urban aesthetic [15]. Collectively, the pattern communicates in coded, visual-only register, mobilizing a contemplative rather than declarative interaction with viewers.

Why does this pattern emerge? This form-conscious, text-free design likely reflects a need for discreet yet impactful expression—perhaps originating from contexts where overt messaging could provoke censorship or erasure. The semiotic strategy aligns with Barthes' notion of connotation: the mural conveys emotions and ideological pressure without explicit referents, which allows affective resonance across diverse viewers. It may also signal subcultural solidarity, coded in visual idioms rather than mainstream language [31]. Such symbolic minimalist strategies echo findings in urban semiotics: simpler, high-contrast motifs circulate more easily across ephemeral, transient spaces and are less likely to be targeted for removal. In short, the absence of words invites interpretive multiplicity and makes the sign more enduring as a visual trope.

4.2. Urban space as discursive canvas

The second image (as shown in Figure 2) depicts a flyover-side mural with a bold, illustrative panel: stylized figures in rural attire—such as rice farmers—are juxtaposed with urban transportation infrastructure. The backdrop is sensitively painted: pastel blue walls with black outlines and text adjacent to the imagery. The mural fuses agrarian iconography with cityscape ridges, creating a layered semiotic interface at a significant architectural node. The setting—a pedestrian underpass or flyover pillar—indexes the mural within daily commuter flow, positioning the artwork as part of a public encounter rather than detached art. Visually, the pastoral subjects evoke national identity tropes and contrasts with the urban frame. The scene communicates layered discourses: nostalgia, nationhood, food sovereignty, and citizen visibility in transit spaces.



Figure 2. This image portrays a flyover mural with socio-political overtones, situated in a prominent public infrastructure.

Visually, the mural displays crisp contour lines and simplified shapes of farming characters carrying produce. The color palette is soft—primarily blues and neutral tones—complementing the surrounding concrete infrastructure. There is text: partially visible, possibly referencing ‘ketahanan pangan’ or food resilience, linking to themes of sustenance and national values. The placement under a flyover ensures exposure to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The mural’s design is inviting, localized, and narratively accessible: it integrates visual storytelling into an otherwise overlooked urban node, transforming it into an encounter site with civic themes.

This pattern emerges from the need to recontextualize urban infrastructure as a site of social and cultural dialogue. The mural’s incorporation of agrarian imagery in the transit environment functions as a visual reminder of shifting socio-economic foundations, reminding urban dwellers of rural roots and food system dependencies. It aligns with VDA’s emphasis on emplacement: placing murals in flyover zones disrupts neutral flows and repositions marginalized narratives into commuter consciousness [30], [32], [33]. The soft palette and familiar motifs facilitate absorption in contrast to aggressive protest slogans, suggesting an approach that invites reflection rather than confrontation. It illustrates how urban space is mobilized as a discursive canvas: the city’s overlooked surfaces—flyover supports, pedestrian corridors—become stages for civic memory and critique.

4.3. Resistance, marginalization, and public voice

This section portrays a street segment plastered with visually bold, layered graffiti and illustrative fragments, as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The art covers an everyday wall—a space of circulation—transforming it into a surface of dissent. Though partly abstract, the overlapping tags and illustrations evoke chaotic dialogue among anonymous urban voices. There is an eruption of expression: layered script, imagery, and colorful tags that compete for visibility. The wall’s ubiquity in pedestrian zones makes it a theater for contestation, enabling multiple inscriptions and interpretations to accumulate over time. This layered aesthetic signals a collaborative, decentralized voice—one of contested appropriation, where each layer adds meaning to the public voice in liminal urban space.



Figure 3. Residents take photos with a mural in the Kendal tunnel in Dukuh Atas, Central Jakarta, as the background on Dec. 12, 2019. It shows artworks in an everyday street context that resonate with critical public sentiment.



Figure 4. Jakarta is Kaste ABC, a boldly spray-painted across an urban facade, signaling questions of belonging and ownership.

Graphically, the wall exhibits interwoven tags and hastily drawn figures, with varying typography—from bubble letters to scribbled cursive—overlapping and obscuring one another. Colors are bright: oranges, whites, blues sit atop darker remnants. There is little cohesive design; instead, a cacophony of micro-messages creates visual noise. The presence of multiple authorship is clear, suggesting the wall operates as a communal canvas. Its informal location—perhaps a residential or alley boundary—enables persistent layering, with new voices inscribing over older ones in an ongoing urban dialogue or struggle for visibility.

This chaotic layering reveals how street art becomes a medium of resistance and marginal public voice. The accumulation of marks suggests a dialogic public sphere—one where marginalized or anonymous actors reclaim urban surfaces to stage contestation. CDA-informed reading identifies this as a decentralized protest technique: each tag or figure is a claim to voice, often untethered from institutional spaces [8], [19].

Visual discourse of urban space ... (Dedy Sartono)

The layering strategy dilutes censorship: new voices literally cover the old, making erasure temporary. The dense collage signals rejection of formal aesthetic and political order, signaling autonomy and urgency. The wall becomes both archive and arena: a living chronicle of grievances, identity assertions, and symbolic resistance across time.

5. DISCUSSION

The visual economy of minimalist, monochromatic murals in Jakarta's street art ecosystem suggests a dual function. Functionally, these works operate as enduring semiotic anchors in contested urban environments, where text-free symbolism circumvents linguistic barriers and state scrutiny [34]. Their stark forms are legible to diverse audiences, facilitating cross-cultural and cross-class engagement. However, a potential dysfunction emerges when ambiguity dilutes political specificity—viewers may interpret the message in apolitical or purely aesthetic terms, reducing activist potency [35]. In the Jakarta context, such symbolic compression can be both a protective strategy against erasure and a limiting factor in mobilizing explicit political action. This implies that the semiotic resilience of minimalist designs is balanced by a trade-off in interpretive precision. The result is a form of “coded endurance” where durability in the urban landscape is achieved at the expense of immediate, unambiguous call-to-action discourse.

The prevalence of high-contrast, text-free symbolic murals in Jakarta can be traced to structural conditions of visibility and vulnerability. In cities where political dissent on walls risks rapid removal or legal repercussions, artists often rely on polyvalent signs that retain potency under multiple readings [15]. The underlying structure combines aesthetic economy—reducing the complexity of production for rapid deployment—and socio-political strategy, where ambiguity shields the work from targeted censorship. This design logic resonates with Padawangi's (2014) concept of “hidden transcripts,” wherein subaltern voices encode dissent in culturally opaque forms [36]. In Jakarta's dense visual landscape, such symbols survive longer on walls precisely because they evade overt classification as protest. The causal correlation lies between the regulatory environment, the artist's need for anonymity, and the choice of ambiguous, non-verbal signifiers as a medium of enduring presence.

Murals situated on infrastructural surfaces like flyovers perform a transformative function in Jakarta's public sphere. Functionally, they reframe utilitarian structures as cultural and discursive platforms, infusing daily commuter routes with narratives of identity, heritage, and socio-political reflection [37]. Such placement democratizes access to visual discourse, reaching audiences beyond curated gallery-goers. Yet, dysfunction arises when the thematic intent is co-opted by state or corporate actors, turning grassroots narratives into sanitized urban branding [38]. In the case of agrarian imagery in urban contexts, the mural may serve as a bridge between rural memory and urban present, but risks being read as mere décor without actionable engagement. Thus, the implication is that while infrastructural canvases magnify message visibility, they also risk dilution through overexposure, selective appropriation, or depoliticized reception within the rhythms of urban transit culture.

The emergence of flyover murals with culturally resonant themes stems from the convergence of spatial opportunity and civic necessity. Structurally, large infrastructural surfaces offer visibility to mass audiences, particularly in megacities where visual competition is intense [39]. Artists and community groups strategically target these sites to intercept high-volume pedestrian and vehicular flows, embedding their narratives into the city's daily sensory fabric [40]. Underlying this choice is the recognition that infrastructural nodes are socially neutral spaces—owned by none, accessible to many—making them fertile grounds for inclusive discourse. In Jakarta, this aligns with historical traditions of public art as civic commentary, adapted to modern transport corridors. The causal mechanism links the desire for broad public engagement with the affordances of physical scale and location, producing a practice that both leverages and transforms the city's infrastructural landscape into a socio-political interface.

The layered, chaotic graffiti walls in Jakarta reveal a critical function as participatory archives of dissent. Functionally, such spaces operate as decentralized forums where multiple authors—often anonymous—contribute to a collective voice, contesting dominant narratives [3]. The continuous layering reflects a refusal of fixed meaning, embodying urban democracy in visual form. However, dysfunction arises in the potential for message fragmentation: overlapping inscriptions may obscure earlier content, reducing coherence and making sustained thematic impact difficult. In contexts of social activism, this transience can weaken message retention and hinder collective mobilization. Nonetheless, the walls' instability is also their strength—an ever-evolving palimpsest that resists singular appropriation. The implication is that such surfaces exemplify a radical openness in urban communication, where meaning is negotiated in real time through unregulated public inscription.

The proliferation of layered graffiti walls is rooted in the structural dynamics of access, anonymity, and temporality in Jakarta's public spaces. These walls are typically situated in liminal zones—alleys, backstreets, transit corridors—where formal regulation is minimal, enabling sustained cycles of addition and

overpainting [35]. The underlying mechanism mirrors what Kurjanovic et al (2024) calls the “right to the city” as marginalized actors claim visibility through iterative inscription [41]. Each layer represents both erasure and renewal, a process driven by the low material cost of production and the communal ethos of street-level art scenes. In the Jakarta context, such layering is also a pragmatic adaptation to rapid urban change: by accepting impermanence, artists embed resilience into the medium itself. The causal correlation ties together the socio-spatial marginality of these sites, the culture of open authorship, and the political necessity of ephemeral yet persistent public voice.

6. CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is the identification of Jakarta’s street art as a dynamic, multimodal discourse that combines semiotic symbolism, spatial emplacement, and ideological resistance in shaping urban narratives. The study reveals that minimalist symbolic murals function as coded endurance strategies, infrastructural murals transform utilitarian spaces into civic dialogue platforms, and layered graffiti walls operate as participatory archives of dissent. These insights expand the scholarly perspective on urban semiotics by integrating three analytical frameworks—Semiotic Analysis, Visual Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis—into a single methodological design. This integrated approach allows for a holistic reading of visual, textual, and spatial elements simultaneously, offering a replicable model for future urban discourse studies. By aligning micro-level sign interpretation with macro-level socio-political contexts, the research contributes to both visual communication studies and critical urban theory, reframing Jakarta’s street art from mere cultural ornamentation to a politically charged semiotic infrastructure.

However, the study is limited by its reliance on a purposive sample that may not capture the full breadth of Jakarta’s geographically and thematically diverse street art scene. Temporal constraints also mean that the research cannot fully account for the ephemeral nature of urban artworks, many of which are altered or removed rapidly. The heavy dependence on publicly available digital archives introduces potential bias toward more widely circulated works, potentially overlooking localized or subcultural pieces with significant meaning to specific communities. Future research should incorporate longitudinal fieldwork to trace the lifecycle of artworks, combined with ethnographic engagement with artists, residents, and local authorities to uncover the lived negotiations behind creation, erasure, and preservation. Expanding comparative analysis to other Indonesian cities would also contextualize Jakarta’s street art within broader national and regional visual cultures, enhancing both theoretical depth and empirical richness.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Dedy Sartono: conceptualization (lead), methodology (lead), semiotic analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors’ institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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