

ISLAMIC HERITAGE BRANDING FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN BATIK DEMAK

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Abstract

The sustainability of traditional cultural industries is increasingly challenged by globalisation and market competition. Previous studies have examined Islamic branding, batik innovation, and culture-based creative economies; however, limited attention has been given to how Islamic symbolic heritage functions as a mechanism for cultural sustainability within religious branding practices. This study analyses how Javanese Islamic values are reinterpreted and integrated into the heritage branding practices of Batik Demak. A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed to examine cultural practices within the batik artisan community. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with artisans, business operators, community leaders, and consumers, as well as analyses of visual documentation and promotional materials. The findings reveal that motifs of the Demak Grand Mosque and the Pintu Bledak function not only as aesthetic elements but also as media for reinterpreting Javanese Islamic values, including itqan, tawazun, and spiritual awareness. These values shape a branding narrative that positions batik production as an ethical and religiously meaningful creative practice. This study demonstrates that Islamic heritage branding can support cultural sustainability by integrating religious symbolism, production ethics, and community identity within a value-based branding system. The findings situate Batik Demak within broader discussions of ethical branding and religion-based cultural economies while showing how local Islamic heritage can strengthen cultural identity and sustain creative industries. The study also

highlights the need for comparative and mixed-methods research to examine the broader economic impact of religious branding across batik-producing regions.

Keberlanjutan industri budaya tradisional semakin ditantang oleh globalisasi dan kompetisi pasar. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya telah mengkaji pelabelan merek Islam (*Islamic branding*), inovasi batik, dan ekonomi kreatif berbasis budaya; namun, perhatian yang diberikan pada bagaimana warisan simbolis Islam berfungsi sebagai mekanisme keberlanjutan budaya dalam praktik pelabelan merek berbasis agama masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam Jawa diinterpretasikan kembali dan diintegrasikan ke dalam praktik pelabelan merek warisan budaya pada Batik Demak. Pendekatan etnografi kualitatif diterapkan untuk mengkaji praktik-praktik budaya di dalam komunitas pengrajin batik. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam dengan para pengrajin, pelaku usaha, tokoh masyarakat, dan konsumen, serta analisis dokumentasi visual dan materi promosi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motif Masjid Agung Demak dan Pintu Bledek tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai elemen estetika, tetapi juga sebagai media untuk menginterpretasikan kembali nilai-nilai Islam Jawa, termasuk *itqan*, *tawazun*, dan kesadaran spiritual. Nilai-nilai ini membentuk narasi pelabelan merek yang memosisikan produksi batik sebagai sebuah praktik kreatif yang etis dan bermakna secara religius. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pelabelan merek warisan Islam dapat mendukung keberlanjutan budaya dengan mengintegrasikan simbolisme agama, etika produksi, dan identitas komunitas ke dalam sistem pelabelan merek berbasis nilai. Temuan ini menempatkan Batik Demak ke dalam diskusi yang lebih luas mengenai pelabelan merek yang etis (*ethical branding*) dan ekonomi budaya berbasis agama, sekaligus menunjukkan bagaimana warisan Islam lokal dapat memperkuat identitas budaya dan mempertahankan industri kreatif. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti perlunya penelitian komparatif dan metode campuran (*mixed-methods*) untuk mengkaji dampak ekonomi yang lebih luas dari pelabelan merek berbasis agama di berbagai wilayah penghasil batik.

Keywords: *cultural sustainability, Batik Demak, Islamic heritage branding, Javanese Islamic values, religious branding*

Introduction

The traditional batik industry faces sustainability challenges amidst globalisation and market competition. The rise of printed batik and industrial textiles is increasing pressure on hand-drawn batik, which requires a longer production time. This situation is undermining the competitiveness of many local batik centres. In Indonesia, batik has been recognised as a world cultural heritage by UNESCO. However, the sustainability of batik does not depend solely on conservation efforts. The batik industry is also required to build

cultural differentiation to remain relevant in the contemporary market (Raya et al., 2021). In this context, culture-based branding strategies are becoming increasingly important. Cultural branding positions cultural narratives as a source of identity and product differentiation (Holt, 2004). Heritage branding also utilises historical symbols and cultural heritage to strengthen authenticity and consumer trust (Han et al., 2021). These challenges are also faced by Batik Demak, which must maintain its religious identity amidst competition from the modern batik industry.

As a cultural heritage, batik serves not only as an aesthetic artefact but also as a medium for the expression of an ever-evolving social identity. Tradition is not static; rather, it is continually reinterpreted in line with changing social and economic contexts (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012). This is evident in the way batik must adapt to market dynamics and consumer preferences. From a branding perspective, the strength of products rooted in cultural heritage lies in their authenticity and the emotional resonance they evoke with consumers (Kapferer, 2012). In the context of Batik Demak, local Islamic symbols have the potential to shape an Islamic heritage branding strategy that supports the cultural and economic sustainability of batik.

In the context of Demak, batik's cultural identity is closely linked to Javanese Islamic heritage. This heritage is reflected in religious symbols such as the Great Mosque of Demak. Javanese Islam is understood not only as a theological doctrine but also as a cultural practice intertwined with the community's social values and local symbols (Woodward, 1989). Studies on Javanese religion also indicate that Javanese religious practices have evolved through a synthesis of Islamic teachings and local cultural traditions (Beatty, 1999). These values form an ethical system and a living symbolism within the community's social practices (Susilo & Syato, 2016). In this study, Javanese Islamic values are understood as religious values manifested in cultural symbols, work practices, and the community's aesthetic expressions. These values encompass an ethos of precision, balance, and spiritual orientation reflected in batik production practices in Demak. These values subsequently form the cultural foundation for the emergence of Islamic heritage branding practices that link the community's religious identity with strategies for differentiating batik products.

Islamic branding is often understood as a strategy that emphasises adherence to Islamic values in production, distribution, and marketing communications (Wilson & Liu, 2011). This approach is frequently associated

with halal certification practices and the segmentation of the Muslim market. However, recent research indicates that religion also functions as a source of consumer identity within the marketplace (Sandıkcı, 2024). This debate suggests that Islamic branding can be understood not only as a commercial instrument, but also as a cultural practice that embodies religious values and community identity. In the context of Demak, local Islamic symbols, such as the Demak Mosque and the Pintu Bledek, are part of the identity narrative of batik products. These symbols can foster emotional and spiritual connections among producers, products, and consumers.

Several studies have examined innovation and branding capabilities within the batik industry (Zainurrafiqi et al., 2025), as well as the role of green innovation and knowledge management in enhancing the competitiveness of small businesses (Achmad & Wiratmadja, 2025). Other studies also indicate that cultural values and local wisdom can support the sustainability of the creative economy (Kusuma et al., 2023). However, research integrating symbols of Islamic heritage with branding strategies to explain the mechanisms of cultural sustainability remains limited. This gap is evident in Batik Demak, which possesses a strong religious identity as a city of Islamic heritage. Therefore, this study analyses how Javanese Islamic values are reinterpreted in the practice of Islamic heritage branding and their role in supporting cultural sustainability in Batik Demak.

Method

This study employs a qualitative, ethnographic approach to understand how Javanese Islamic values are represented in the practice of Islamic heritage branding in Batik Demak. Ethnography was chosen because religious branding in this context functions not only as a marketing strategy but also as a cultural practice that incorporates religious symbols, ethical values, and communal significance. This approach allows the researcher to observe directly how these symbols and values are produced, interpreted, and communicated in the batik production process as well as in the social interactions of the artisan community (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) Thus, ethnography is an appropriate method for analysing the relationship between cultural symbols, work practices, and the construction of Islamic heritage branding in Batik Demak.

The research was conducted in several centres of Batik Demak production, specifically in the Demak, Wonosalam, and Mangunjiwan areas. These locations were chosen for their historical links to local Islamic traditions and

the development of the batik artisan community. Research informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in batik production and development. The 15 informants consisted of 8 batik artisans, 3 business owners, 2 community leaders, and 2 consumers.. The criteria for selecting informants included at least five years' experience in batik production or marketing, as well as involvement in local batik community activities. Field data collection was carried out over six months through direct interaction with the artisan community. The interview process was halted once data saturation was reached, that is, when the information obtained began to show recurring patterns and no longer yielded new themes.

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation focused on the batik production process, the use of Islamic symbols in motifs, and social interactions among artisans within the Batik Demak community. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach with a thematic guide covering the meaning of motifs, Javanese Islamic values in work practices, and how religious symbols are used in narratives of identity and the promotion of batik products. This research adopts an interpretive ethnography approach, which emphasises understanding the meaning of symbols and cultural practices within community life (Anderson-Levitt, 2022; Geertz, 1976). Documentation comprising archives, motif catalogues, batik photographs, and promotional materials was used to supplement and verify field data (Robben & Sluka, 2012).

Data analysis was conducted using an interpretative ethnographic approach that emphasises thick description to understand cultural symbols and meanings (Dourish, 2014; Geertz, 1976). The analysis process involved repeated coding and thematic interpretation. Initial themes emerged inductively from observational data and interviews, and were subsequently interpreted with reference to the theoretical framework of Islamic heritage branding and Javanese Islamic values. The analysis focused on three dimensions: the role of Islamic values in shaping motifs and production practices, the construction of religious branding narratives, and the integration of Islamic cultural symbols into sustainability practices. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation (artisans, community leaders, consumers) and methodological triangulation (observation, interviews, documentation) (Meydan & Akkas, 2024). The researchers also maintained reflexive field notes throughout the study to minimise bias in data interpretation.

Finding and Discussion

Islamic Heritage Motifs as a Mechanism of Cultural Sustainability

In Javanese Islamic tradition, visual symbols serve as a medium for conveying religious values and the community's cultural identity (Lee-Niinioja, 2022). Islam in Java developed through a process of interaction between Islamic teachings and local cultural practices, so that cultural symbols often serve as an important means of expressing religious values in everyday life (Beatty, 1999; Woodward, 1989). Batik motifs in Demak developed within a social environment with a strong history as a centre for the spread of Islam in Java. This historical legacy is reflected in various cultural artefacts, ranging from the architecture of the Great Mosque of Demak to the batik craft practices that have flourished within the community. In this context, batik motifs are not merely decorative elements. They serve as a symbolic medium representing the values of Javanese Islam that are alive within the community's cultural practices.

The symbolic anthropology approach helps to explain how cultural symbols function within the social life of religious communities. Geertz (2012) explains that symbols not only represent beliefs but also shape how communities understand the world and regulate social behaviour. In the practice of Batik Demak, symbols such as mosques, doors, and lightning are translated into a visual language easily recognisable to the local community. These symbols convey religious messages about the values of faith (*iman*), *ihsan* (*ethical beauty*), precision (*itqan*), and balance (*tawazun*). These values are not only present in the symbolic meaning of the motifs but also shape the artisans' work ethic during the batik production process. Thus, visual symbols serve not only as cultural representations but also as a medium for instilling religious values within the social and economic practices of the artisan community.

From the perspective of Islamic heritage branding, these symbols also serve as a source of product identity. Motifs derived from local Islamic heritage help to build the image of Batik Demak as a product with strong cultural roots and religious values. The integration of cultural heritage symbols into branding can strengthen a product's authenticity and credibility, as consumers perceive these symbols as representations of history and community identity (Kapferer, 2012). These symbols simultaneously distinguish Batik Demak from other coastal batik traditions. Thus, batik motifs serve not only as a cultural expression but also as a branding mechanism that connects religious identity, historical narratives, and community values. The integration of Islamic heritage

symbols with production practices forms the basis for Islamic heritage branding, which supports the cultural sustainability of Batik Demak.

The Great Mosque of Demak Motif as a Medium for Transmitting Local Islamic Values

The motif of the Demak Grand Mosque is one of the most significant visual representations in Batik Demak. This mosque is understood not only as a religious building but also as a historical symbol of Islam's spread in Java. In the collective memory of the people of Demak, the Grand Mosque serves as a marker of religious legitimacy and cultural identity. When this symbol is translated into a batik motif, its religious and historical significance is carried over into the product's identity. In the context of heritage branding, the use of historical symbols such as the Demak Grand Mosque reinforces the image of Batik Demak as a product with deep historical roots and distinctive spiritual values (Li et al., 2025; Pfannes et al., 2021). These heritage symbols help to shape a narrative of identity that sets Batik Demak apart from other commercial batik products.

Visually, the motifs of Demak Mosque typically feature tiered roofs, a hallmark of its architecture. The local community interprets these three tiers of the roof as representing iman, Islam, and ihsan. This interpretation demonstrates that architectural symbols are not merely aesthetic forms but also reminders of religious values in the community's daily lives. From a symbolic-anthropological perspective, cultural symbols function as a system of meaning that links religious beliefs to the community's social practices. In the context of Batik Demak, these symbols become a visual language that expresses religious values in the community's cultural and economic life. A Batik Demak artisan explained: "When we draw the roof of the Great Mosque, it is not merely a building shape. There is a prayer that the wearer may always remember three things: syari'ah, faith, and ihsan." (Interview, January 2025). This statement indicates that the Demak Mosque motif was not created solely as a visual design. The motif is understood as a religious symbol that conveys a spiritual message to the wearer. In branding practice, symbolic meanings such as this serve as a product identity narrative that strengthens the emotional bond between the product and the consumer. Consumers do not merely view the motif as an ornament but also as a representation of the religious values inherent in Batik Demak's identity.

From a branding perspective, heritage symbols such as the Demak Mosque also serve as a source of brand authenticity. Consumers tend to view products linked to history and tradition as more authentic and possessing high cultural value. The religious narrative inherent in the mosque motif helps to strengthen consumer trust in Batik Demak products. In this context, heritage symbols function as symbolic capital that enhances the product's cultural value whilst reinforcing Batik Demak's position in the competitive batik market.



Figure 1. The Great Mosque of Demak Motif in Batik

The relationship between religious symbols and production practices is also evident in the way artisans interpret their working processes. One artisan explained the importance of precision when drawing mosque motifs: “*We must be meticulous, because if the stroke is wrong, it is not only a flaw in the batik, but it can also be seen as disrespecting the mosque.*” (Interview, January 2025). This statement indicates that batik production is not guided solely by aesthetic considerations. The working process is also influenced by religious awareness and a moral responsibility towards the symbols used. The principles of *itqan* (meticulousness) and *tawazun* (balance) are reflected in the detail of the motifs and the composition of the designs. These values shape the artisans' work ethic whilst reinforcing the image of Batik Demak as a product created with religious awareness and moral responsibility (Yasin et al., 2025).

Thus, the Demak Grand Mosque motif functions on two levels simultaneously. On a symbolic level, this motif conveys the values of Javanese Islam that are alive within the artisan community. On a branding level, the symbol reinforces Batik Demak's identity as a product with strong religious legitimacy and local history. The integration of heritage symbols, value-based production practices, and this narrative of identity demonstrates how Islamic

heritage branding establishes product differentiation whilst supporting the cultural sustainability of Batik Demak (Kaswandi et al., 2025).

The Pintu Bledek Motif in Batik Demak

The 'Pintu Bledek' (lightning door) motif in Batik Demak originates from one of the key architectural elements of the Demak Grand Mosque, which, in local tradition, is associated with Ki Ageng Selo, a spiritual figure believed to possess the ability to capture lightning. In the collective memory of the community, this door is understood not only as part of the mosque's architecture but also as a symbol of spiritual power and the legitimacy of the saints. When this symbol is translated into a batik motif, a transformation occurs, shifting it from a sacred artefact to a visual symbol that can circulate within everyday cultural practices.

Based on a symbolic-anthropological perspective, religious symbols not only represent beliefs but also shape how communities understand and conduct their social lives (Geertz, 2012). The Pintu Bledek not only reflects belief in the *wali's* miraculous powers but also embodies moral values such as courage, steadfastness of faith, and spiritual protection. Turner (1967) explains that ritual symbols serve as a link between religious experience and social action. In the context of batik, these symbols are reinterpreted as a visual language that allows religious values to be present in both production and consumption.

A batik artisan in Kadilangu explains how this meaning is understood in the production process: "*When we paint the Pintu Bledek motif, it is not just the door that appears, but also a prayer that the batik brings protection to its wearer.*" (Interview, January 2025). This statement suggests that the Pintu Bledek motif is not merely an aesthetic element but also a spiritual symbol that embodies prayers and hopes. In this context, the practice of batik-making is not separate from its religious dimension but rather forms part of the expression of values alive within the artisan community.

From a branding perspective, the Pintu Bledek symbol functions as a mechanism for brand differentiation. Unlike the Demak Mosque motif, which emphasises historical legitimacy and authenticity, this motif presents a more personal and symbolic spiritual narrative. The integration of heritage symbols into branding enables batik products to possess a distinctive and easily recognisable identity. Napoli et al. (2014) explain that the consistent use of cultural heritage can enhance a brand's credibility and uniqueness. In this context, the Pintu Bledek symbol serves as a source of symbolic capital,

strengthening Batik Demak's position in the competitive batik market.



Figure 2. The Pintu Bledek Motif in Batik Demak

These symbols also shape consumers' perceptions of a product's value. Motifs that convey a narrative of protection and spiritual strength tend to appeal to consumers seeking products with cultural and religious significance. Thus, the Pintu Bledek symbol serves not only as a visual element but also as a strategy to build an emotional connection and consumer trust in batik products.

The ethical dimension of the work is also evident in the production process of this motif. The complexity of the Pintu Bledek's ornamentation demands great precision and patience. One craftsman remarked: *"If the lines are careless, it feels like we do not respect the history behind the door."* (Interview, January 2025). This statement indicates that the production process is guided not only by aesthetic standards but also by religious awareness and moral responsibility. The principles of *itqan* (meticulousness) and *tawazun* (balance) are reflected in the artisans' working practices and form part of the values inherent in the products.

From a sustainability perspective, the use of the Pintu Bledek symbol contributes to product differentiation and enhances the cultural value of batik. Motifs with religious and historical narratives tend to have greater market appeal, thereby helping ensure the viability of artisans' businesses. This aligns with findings that local wisdom and cultural values can serve as vital resources

in maintaining the sustainability of the creative industries (Kaswandi et al., 2025). Thus, heritage symbols not only preserve cultural identity but also support economic sustainability within the local batik industry.

The transformation of the Pintu Bledek from an architectural artefact into a batik motif demonstrates the Demak community's ability to navigate the relationship between tradition and modernity. A symbol originating from a sacred space now appears in the more dynamic medium of textiles without losing its spiritual significance. This process shows that Islamic heritage branding serves not only as a representation of culture, but also as an adaptive strategy in responding to market changes.

The use of religious symbols in branding also presents the potential for tension between sacred values and commercial interests. The transformation of symbols into market products risks reducing religious meaning to mere economic value. This demonstrates that religion-based branding practices are not always neutral, but must also be viewed critically within the context of the relationship between religion and the market (Sandıkcı, 2024). Therefore, Islamic heritage branding practices require ethical awareness to maintain a balance between preserving spiritual meaning and meeting market demands.

Thus, the Pintu Bledek motif serves both as a visual ornament and as a strategic mechanism within Islamic heritage branding. This motif links heritage symbols, value-based production practices, and market identity. This integration creates product differentiation and reinforces the cultural and economic sustainability of Batik Demak.

Branding as a Form of Contemporary Islamic Cultural Practice

Within coastal Muslim communities, creative economic practices are closely intertwined with the religious values that shape social life. Activities such as production, promotion, and consumption are not viewed merely as economic activities, but also as part of *amal ibadah*—acts of worship—that reflect Islamic identity (Wilson & Liu, 2011). In the context of Demak, this is evident in the way batik artisans build product identity based on spiritual values whilst responding to market demands. However, the use of Islamic symbols in branding practices also creates tension between sacred meaning and commercial interests, as religious values risk being reduced to mere market attributes. In daily practice, artisans operationalise values such as *niyyah*, *itqan*, and *tawazun* in the production process and work-related decision-making. This demonstrates that religious branding in Batik Demak serves both as a

cultural practice and as a space for negotiation between religious meaning and market logic.

The concept of Islamic branding in marketing studies positions a brand as a representation of values, rather than merely a commodity (Wilson, 2012; Wilson & Liu, 2011). In the practice of Batik Demak, this principle is evident in the use of symbols such as the Grand Mosque, the Pintu Bledek, and the 'Religious Batik' label as markers of product identity that link local Islamic history with the community's spiritual values. These religious symbols serve as a differentiation mechanism, distinguishing Batik Demak from other coastal batiks and reinforcing perceptions of authenticity and consumer trust. Consumers consider the product's religious and ethical significance, thereby forming an emotional connection that drives preference and loyalty. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on consistency between the symbols, production practices, and the narrative conveyed. Inconsistencies can reduce religious meaning to a mere decorative attribute. This demonstrates that Islamic branding in Batik Demak functions as a strategic mechanism that shapes product differentiation, consumer trust, and market positioning.

In their daily work, artisans recognise that building a brand is inseparable from the concepts of barakah and intention (*niyyah*). An artisan in the Kadilangu Batik Village stated:

"When we write 'Batik Religi Demak,' it is not just a trade name. We want people to know that this batik is made with the intention of worship. From the moment we start drawing until washing the cloth, we always recite basmalah. We believe that if the intention is good, the result will bring blessings to both the maker and the buyer." (Interview, March 2025)

This statement indicates that *niyyah* serves as the ontological foundation of batik production. Religious intent shapes the way artisans interpret their work, determines quality standards, and maintains consistency throughout the production process. In this context, batik production is understood as an ethical practice that integrates spiritual goals and material outcomes. This practice also shapes social relations within the artisan community, as shared religious values form the basis of trust, cooperation, and legitimacy amongst practitioners. Thus, religious branding does not merely manifest at the level of symbols or narratives, but is rooted in a values-based production ethic that directly influences product quality and the social cohesion of the Batik Demak community.

The religious values internalised within the production process also have strategic implications for competition in the batik market. Practices

based on *niyyah*, *itqan*, and *tawazun* result in quality standards and product consistency that distinguish Batik Demak from non-religious batik products. This differentiation is crucial in an increasingly competitive batik market, where design innovation and mass production dominate. Batik Demak does not compete solely on visual aspects, but on the integration of religious values, production processes, and product narratives. This approach establishes a more specific positioning, namely as a cultural product imbued with spiritual meaning and ethical production principles. In this context, religious branding serves as a differentiation strategy that is difficult for competitors to replicate. This is because it is based on values that are practised within the artisan community. Consequently, the strength of Batik Demak lies in the consistency between values, processes, and products, which reinforces its competitiveness in the batik market.

This practice demonstrates how the concepts of heritage and cultural branding adapt within the context of local Islam (Napoli et al., 2014). Artisans draw upon Demak's identity as the City of the Saints to imbue their products with religious heritage-based significance. Batik is not positioned as a purely aesthetic product; rather, it is understood as part of the ongoing mission of the saints, expressed in visual and material form. A batik entrepreneur stated:

"We realize that many batik products from various regions now compete through design. But we want people to see Batik Demak not only for its beautiful motifs but for the Islamic values behind it. We promote the idea that every motif carries a prayer and a story of the wali, so the wearer also carries a message of goodness." (Interview, March 2025)

This statement indicates that spiritual values are transformed into a product identity strategy. Religious symbols, historical narratives, and production practices form a unified whole within the branding process. This integration can be understood as a mechanism of Islamic heritage branding. This mechanism operates through three main components. Heritage symbols serve as a source of meaning and differentiation. Value-based production practices shape the quality and legitimacy of the product. Identity narratives connect the product with consumers. The combination of these three components forms a brand identity rooted in cultural and spiritual foundations. This process strengthens Batik Demak's position in the market whilst safeguarding cultural sustainability by reproducing values in production and consumption practices.

Religious branding can be understood as an Islamic cultural practice that incorporates spiritual values into production ethics. The integration of the values of *niyyah*, *itqan*, and *tawazun* into the batik production process

demonstrates that religious values not only shape symbolic meaning but also influence working standards and product quality. In line with the views of Ali & Al-Owaihan (2008), the concept of beauty in Islamic work relates to spiritual awareness in daily practice. In this context, the brand serves as a medium connecting faith with professional activities, in which the production process reflects both economic objectives and religious responsibility.

These practices demonstrate that values are embodied in economic and aesthetic activities. Religious branding in Batik Demak shows that the local Muslim community translates religious values into practical strategies for product differentiation and market positioning. This process links cultural identity, production practices, and market interactions within a single mechanism that supports cultural sustainability. Thus, the creative economy becomes a space where Islamic values are preserved through processes of production, distribution, and reinterpretation within a contemporary context.

Implications for Cultural Sustainability and the Islamic Creative Economy

The presence of Batik Demak as a coastal Javanese artistic heritage demonstrates that sustainability in Islam concerns not only the preservation of cultural products but also the continuity of spiritual, moral, and social values. In Islamic thought, sustainability (*istidamah*) is grounded in the principle of *tawhid*—the unity between creation, the Creator, and humans as God’s stewards on earth (Nasr, 1987). Thus, every creative act performed by humans must be oriented toward ethical beauty (*ihsan*) and balance (*tawazun*). This aligns with the views of (Alotaibi, 2021) who assert that integrating Islamic values into cultural practices such as batik serves as an effective means of strengthening communal character and spirituality, since art in Islam is not merely an aesthetic expression but also a form of worship that shapes moral conduct.

Batik Demak illustrates that cultural sustainability can be achieved through creative work grounded in Islamic ethics. Indriya et al. (2023) show that innovation within the batik industry, when rooted in religious values, can enhance economic competitiveness while safeguarding local traditions. This phenomenon is clearly visible in Demak, where artisans regard batik-making as a form of *amal saleh* (righteous deed) that embodies the principles of *itqan* (precision) and *barakah* (blessing). In this context, the sustainability of the creative economy is not determined solely by production efficiency but also by the spiritual capital embedded in the community’s work system.

As highlighted by Shahimi & Zahari (2025), an Islamic economy grounded in ethical principles and social balance has great potential to foster sustainable innovation without compromising humanity and morality.

Furthermore, the cultural and economic sustainability of Islamic creative industries in Demak has a strong social dimension. Nurcholis et al. (2021) note that religious practices such as da'wah and Islamic arts function as interactive rituals that reinforce social cohesion and collective identity. In the context of batik, activities such as the Batik Wali Festival, women's artisan training programs, and religious branding initiatives demonstrate how the community strengthens Islamic values through social mechanisms rooted in tradition. As stated by Ngatono et al. (2024), integrating religious values into the creative economy becomes an effective means of maintaining identity and community solidarity.

Islamic Socio-Cultural Implications: Batik Demak as Da'wah and Transmission of Values

The preservation of Islamic values through batik in Demak reflects social and spiritual practices within community life. Demak's identity as the "Kota Wali" shapes how artisans interpret batik-making as a form of religious expression within the cultural sphere. Motifs such as the Grand Mosque, the Pintu Bledak, the Wali Songo, and symbols of the crescent moon and star serve as visual markers linking Islamic values with local aesthetic practices. In this context, batik is not produced merely as a visual object, but as a medium that carries ethical values, religious meaning, and the collective memory of the community. This practice demonstrates that batik production can be understood as a form of cultural work that integrates artistic expression with spiritual values in everyday life.

This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Indriya et al., (2023), which show that integrating Islamic values into IRD Batik Walisongo motifs functions as a means of education and strengthening Islamic entrepreneurial character. Values such as *itqan* (precision), *tawazun* (balance), and *amanah* (trustworthiness) guide the creative process. A senior artisan expressed: "We make batik while remembering God. Each time we apply wax, we recite, *basmalah* so that the result brings blessings. If something goes wrong, we take it as a test of patience, not merely a work mistake." (Interview, Kadilangu, 2025). This statement indicates that the batik-making process is carried out as a working practice grounded in religious consciousness. The production activity is not separated from spiritual

values, but is carried out as “*embodied religious labour*” that integrates intention, action, and the work’s outcome. In this context, the quality of the product is determined not only by technical aspects but also by the ethical orientation that shapes the artisan’s work. The concept of beauty in Islamic art, as put forward by Nasr (1987), can be understood as a reflection of spiritual order in the production process, in which the visual outcome reflects discipline, patience, and religious consciousness in the working process.

In addition to its spiritual dimension, Batik Demak also serves as a medium for communicating collective values and identity. The batik-making process not only produces a product but also conveys religious significance to consumers. One artisan stated: social practices that instill values of togetherness, perseverance, and sincerity. A young artisan noted: “*When we explain the batik motifs to customers, we also tell the stories behind them—the Great Mosque, the wali, the meaning of patience and gratitude. So this batik is not just cloth; it is a reminder to do good.*” (Interview, March 2025). This statement indicates that branding practices involve the communication of values through direct interaction between artisans and consumers. In this context, branding can be understood as a form of aesthetic da’wah, namely the dissemination of Islamic values through visual media and product narratives (Shahimi & Zahari, 2025). This process takes place through three mechanisms. Visual symbols convey religious meaning in a readily recognisable form. Product narratives explain the values behind these symbols. Social interaction reinforces consumers’ understanding and acceptance. This process aligns with the view that values can be communicated through cultural practices via symbols, narratives, and social participation (Babushkina & Kalugina, 2024). Thus, batik functions as a medium for communicating values that connect production, consumption, and religious identity within a single cultural practice.

From a social perspective, the practice of batik in Demak serves as a mechanism for reproducing community values and identity. Activities such as batik training, the Wali Batik Festival, and Islamic batik exhibitions provide a space for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge whilst expanding social networks and markets. These activities indirectly instill religious values and work ethics in young artisans. In this context, batik functions as a medium that maintains continuity between tradition and economic practice. Mickiewicz (2022) explains that religious symbols play a role in preserving collective memory and community consciousness. This process is evident in Demak’s batik practices, which link historical identity to contemporary production.

Exhibitions and cross-regional interactions also increase product visibility and expand market access. In line with Cisneros (2011), the sustainability of cultural identity in a global context depends on a community's ability to communicate values through social practices. Thus, batik practices establish social mechanisms that support the regeneration of artisans, market expansion, and the sustainability of the Batik Demak industry.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic heritage branding functions as a mechanism that integrates heritage symbols, value-based production practices, and social interaction within a single system. Religious symbols shape product differentiation and meaning. Value-based production practices ensure quality and legitimacy. Social interactions reinforce the transmission of values and the expansion of markets. The integration of these three elements forms a model of cultural sustainability that maintains continuity between cultural identity, economic activity, and religious life in Batik Demak.

Implications for the Islamic Creative Economy: Value-Based Mechanisms of Sustainability

In this study, the Islamic creative economy is understood as a creative economic practice that integrates cultural symbols, Islamic ethical values, and a focus on sustainability within a single production system. In the case of Batik Demak, the transformation from traditional craftsmanship to products based on religious branding demonstrates that economic activity is not solely profit-oriented but also focused on fostering trust and social sustainability. The concept of barakah in this practice is reflected in efforts to maintain product quality, ensure honesty in transactions, and uphold consistent values throughout the production process. Meanwhile, *masalah* is realised through social impacts such as community engagement, the sustainability of small businesses, and the broader distribution of economic benefits. Thus, the practice of Batik Demak demonstrates that integrating religious values can strengthen product legitimacy, build consumer trust, and support economic sustainability within the culture-based creative industry.

Batik Demak demonstrates that Islamic ethical values are put into practice in production and influence economic mechanisms. The use of religious motifs, such as the Grand Mosque and the Pintu Bledek, is combined with targeted design and promotional strategies. These practices not only ensure compliance with halal principles but also establish product quality and consistency standards. A business owner in Kadilangu stated:

“We always ensure that the materials and processes remain clean, that we do not deceive buyers, and that we do not rush just to sell quickly. The principle is not just to be profitable but to be halal and blessed. Because if batik is made with good intentions, insyaAllah the result will bring goodness to everyone.” (Interview, February 2025)

This statement suggests that values such as honesty, diligence, and good faith extend beyond the realm of ethics. These values serve as mechanisms that build consumer trust and reduce transactional uncertainty. In a market context, these practices foster consumer loyalty and position the product as having cultural and spiritual value. Consequently, production ethics are not merely a standard but also a source of differentiation and legitimacy that enhances Batik Demak’s competitiveness within the batik industry.

The economic practices of Batik Demak also demonstrate links to Islamic social financing mechanisms, particularly through the utilisation of zakat funds and productive waqf-based schemes at the community level. Several batik groups have utilised training and capital support to strengthen production capacity and empower female artisans and micro-enterprises. In this context, waqf serves as an economic mechanism that promotes business sustainability by improving skills, expanding access to production, and stabilizing income (Mukhlisin et al., 2025). This pattern indicates that the economic practices of Batik Demak do not rely solely on market logic, but are also supported by a community-based system that reinforces local economic resilience.

The integration of social financing and production activities demonstrates that sustainability is determined by both market demand and the community’s ability to build an inclusive economic system. The value of *maslahah* extends beyond a merely normative concept. It is realised in the broader distribution of economic benefits, including the enhancement of artisans’ capacities and the expansion of business opportunities. This practice broadens our understanding of the Islamic creative economy as a system that links religious values, institutional mechanisms, and community-based economic sustainability.

The digitalisation of Batik Demak demonstrates how religious values are integrated into technology-based market communication strategies. The use of social media serves not only as a promotional channel but also as a space to convey the product’s religious narratives. In this context, the practice known as economic e-da’wah can be understood as a digital marketing activity that combines commercial objectives with the communication of Islamic values through visual and narrative content. Unlike conventional digital marketing, which focuses on product persuasion, this approach emphasises symbolic meaning, spiritual stories, and ethical messages in every product

communication.

This practice is evident in the way artisans present batik through posts that feature stories of saints, the philosophy behind the motifs, and the prayers that accompany the production process. This strategy fosters an emotional connection and reinforces consumers' perception of authenticity. From a market perspective, this religious narrative functions as a differentiation mechanism that enhances product visibility whilst expanding market reach through digital networks (Halim et al., 2025). Thus, digitalisation increases market access whilst reinforcing Batik Demak's position as a product with cultural and spiritual value that is consistently communicated.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic heritage branding in Batik Demak operates as a value-based mechanism that integrates symbolic resources, ethical production practices, and socio-economic networks within a single system. Religious symbols function as sources of differentiation and meaning. Value-based production practices ensure quality, trust, and legitimacy. Social and digital interactions facilitate the transmission of value and market expansion. The integration of these elements forms a sustainability mechanism that connects cultural identity, economic activity, and religious values in the Islamic creative economy. This model demonstrates that sustainability in culture-based industries can be achieved by aligning symbolic, ethical, and economic dimensions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Batik Demak functions as a value-based mechanism that integrates Islamic symbols, ethically grounded production practices, and socio-economic interactions into a cohesive system. Motifs such as the Great Mosque and the Pintu Bledek serve as symbolic sources that shape the product's meaning and differentiation. Production practices grounded in values such as *itqan* and honesty help establish trust and legitimacy of the products. Social and digital interactions support the transmission of values while expanding market reach. This integration demonstrates that Islamic heritage branding maintains continuity between cultural identity, economic activity, and religious values. In this regard, the study contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the strengthening of community-based creative industries, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through the preservation of local cultural heritage,

and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through ethically grounded production practices.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of research on the Islamic creative economy by demonstrating that the sustainability of culture-based industries can be built through the interconnection between symbolic, ethical and economic dimensions. These findings expand the discourse on Islamic entrepreneurship by affirming that religious values are not merely normative but also operational mechanisms that shape brand differentiation, consumer trust, and community-based economic resilience. In this context, Batik Demak represents a values-based sustainability model rooted in local Islamic heritage.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a specific geographical area and a relatively small number of informants concentrated within Batik Demak production centres. These conditions may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of analysis and employ mixed methods to examine the economic impact of religious branding more systematically. Comparative studies across different batik-producing regions may also provide further insights into how Islamic values are operationalised within diverse creative economy contexts.

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