



The meaning of religious symbolic signs in children's clothing as souvenirs from Ampel Village, Surabaya

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Received:

01/04/2026

Final Revision:

03/04/2026

Accepted:

08/04/2026



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Abstract.

This study aims to analyze the meaning of religious symbols used in children's clothing as souvenirs from Ampel, Surabaya. Nearly all of the symbols have undergone a long process of acculturation, through which they have acquired the religious meanings recognized today. The problem addressed in this study is whether these symbols still retain their religious meanings and to what extent their meanings have shifted. This study analyzes children's clothing as the research object and uses Roland Barthes' visual semiotics framework as the method due to its compatibility in examining symbolic signs at the level of denotation, connotation, and myth. The results of this study demonstrate that the Ampel gate, gold color, and typography function as specific semiotic elements that construct layered meanings related to sacred space, cultural hybridity, and commodification. The symbols remain relevant; however, their meanings have shifted from purely spiritual representations to visual forms shaped by tourism consumption. This study is recommended to serve as the foundation for developing knowledge in tourism souvenir design that represents religious meaning more critically and contextually.

Keywords: Religious Symbolism in Design; Tourism Souvenir Design, Religious-Themed Souvenir; Cultural Hybridity; Visual Semiotics

Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a population of diverse backgrounds; including race, ethnicity, and religion, which influence the behavior and mindset of each individual. The government officially recognizes at least six religions that have been designated as official religions for the people of Indonesia, namely: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The majority religions of Indonesian are Islam (Anwar, 2018). Islam spread to Indonesia due to its strategic position along major ancient trade routes, Indian Ocean and South China Sea. This position facilitated not only economic exchange but also the circulation of religious values and cultural interactions. Several Arabic sources describe the sailing route that started from Persian Gulf to South China's harbors, with the cross point at Strait of Malacca. Traders of herbs and spices from Aden, in Yemen, started to recognize the existence of Muslim people in a place known as "Java" in the early 13th century. Ports at the north coast of Java's Island like Gresik and Tuban started to occur due to influence from important figures known as *Wali*. The word "*Wali*" itself comes from Arabic, which means closeness to God. Those *Wali* consist of nine figures and more likely known as *Walisanga*, means nine *Wali* (Laffan, 2015).

One of the most famous *Wali* in Surabaya is *Sunan Ampel*. *Sunan Ampel* came from Champa, born in 1401 AD. His real name was Raden Rachmat. *Sunan Ampel* came to Java, or also known as Majapahit at that time in 1443-1481 AD, he was granted to live at Ampel Village by the King of Majapahit and he was given a chance to spread Islam to the local society. *Sunan Ampel* died in 1467 AD and was buried in a complex near the Ampel Mosque (Mustaqim, 2022). His legacy remains visible

in Ampel Village, which has developed into a religious and cultural tourism destination. This transformation reflects not only historical processes but also ongoing negotiations between religion, culture, and tourism practices.

Ampel Village is administratively located in Semampir Sub-district. The area of Ampel Village is 0,4 km² or 4,41 percent of total area in Semampir Sub-district (Bappeko, 2025). Ampel Village located on the main road of K.H.M. Mansyur. The border of the Ampel Village area on the north side is Ujung village, on the west side is Nyamplungan Village, on the south side is Nyamplungan Village, on the east side is Sidotopo Village (Suryandari & Trilaksono, 2019). Most of the Surabaya people know Ampel Village as the Arab Village area due to its major society ethnicity being Arab (Rahmi Isnaini, 2020:123). Ampel Village is now well known as a cultural and religious tourism destination. Ampel Village as "Arab Village" certainly produces various forms of visual culture, including souvenirs.

Culture in anthropological terms means as a result of a thought which produces artworks in the life of society through a learning process (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). Culture can be seen in a visual form, called visual culture. Visual culture can take any form that can be experienced through sight and touch, and within that form lie ideas, concepts, and values that are conveyed (Setiawan & Handyaningrum, 2020). Representation, according to Chris Barker (2004) is a set of processes to signifying practices that appear to describe another practice in the real world. Representation is symbolism of a stand-alone object. The analytical breakdown in design theories, especially regarding semiotics, relies heavily on visual symbolism (Arindhani et al., 2025).

The representation of visual culture in Ampel Village as a tourism destination is shown through the souvenirs which contain symbols. Souvenirs can be defined as an item that is associated with a specific event or region, is small in size, and has artistic value (Ramadhan & Islam, 2022). The use of symbols and ornaments can be adapted from Islamic art as well as local cultural elements (Satria et al., 2025).

Souvenirs function not merely as objects of memory but also as symbolic media that represent identity and cultural meaning. The previous study titled *Souvenirs: A Systematic Literature Review (1981-2020) and Research Agenda* emphasizes that souvenirs act as connectors between people and places and operate as symbolic texts, while also highlighting the need for deeper visual semiotic analysis (Shen & Lai, 2022). Their study, however, remains at a macro-level review and lacks object-specific semiotic analysis, which limits its applicability to concrete design practices. Studies on religious symbolism in other contexts further demonstrate the role of symbols in producing meaning. A previous study regarding religious symbols titled *Symbolism, Signifiers and National Identity Cards: Indonesia's Engagement with the 21st Century Reality of Religious Diversity & Inclusion* (Bedeau, 2014). Bedeau's study shows that religious symbols in Indonesian identity cards function as signifiers that construct ideological and formal identities, yet the focus is limited to institutional discourse rather than everyday visual consumption, leaving unanswered how such symbols operate within commercial design contexts. An article titled *Simbol Spiritualitas dan Tradisi Kerajaan: Studi pada Wisata Religi Sunan Ampel dan Keraton Solo* reveals that symbols in religious tourism sites such as Sunan Ampel serve both spiritual and cultural branding functions, but their analysis is restricted to spatial and ritual dimensions, without addressing their transformation into reproducible visual *media* (Enjelina et al., 2025). An article titled *A Semiotic Analysis of Cultural and Religious Symbolism in the Ornaments of An-Nur Grand Mosque Riau*, in visual semiotics context, demonstrates that religious symbols in mosque ornaments generate layered meanings at denotative, connotative, and mythological levels (Fauziah, 2025). This study, however, focuses on static architectural objects, thus overlooking the dynamic nature of symbols in mass-produced design.

These limitations indicate a critical gap in understanding how religious symbols are translated, simplified, reproduced, and reinterpreted within everyday consumer products, particularly in the context of tourism commodification and visual culture. This gap is increasingly urgent in contemporary design practices, where cultural symbols are rapidly reproduced and circulated without critical reflection on their shifting meanings. Previous studies only tend to acknowledge the symbolic nature of religious elements, they do not critically examine how meaning changes when symbols are detached

from their original spatial and ritual contexts and embedded into commodified visual forms, especially within the intersection of tourism, design, and consumer culture.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on the analysis of religious symbolic signs in children's clothing souvenirs from Ampel Village using Roland Barthes' visual semiotics framework. The research specifically examines how meaning is constructed at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, and how these meanings contribute to the representation of religiosity, cultural identity, and commercialization. This study offers a new perspective on how religious meaning is visually constructed in everyday consumption, by shifting the analytical focus from architectural and ritual contexts to mass-produced design objects, highlighting its relevance to contemporary visual culture and design practice.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on children's clothing as a medium of religious representation, an area that has been largely overlooked in previous studies. This study also contributes methodologically by applying visual semiotics to mass-produced commodified design objects and analytically by revealing the transformation of sacred symbols into consumable visual forms, thereby offering implications for more critical and context-aware souvenir design practices. This research, therefore, contributes to the broader discourse on visual culture, semiotics, and religious tourism by revealing how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and circulated through everyday objects in a culturally hybrid and commodified environment.

Methods

The method used in this study is a qualitative method, with a visual semiotics analysis approach by Roland Barthes. A qualitative method is a method which uses narrative and conceptual forms instead of statistics. This method is chosen due to the research purposes to unveil the meaning produced by symbolic signs in Ampel Village's souvenirs. Visual semiotics means understanding people's way constructing and interpreting meaning from various visual messages in systems like graphics, picture, body language, and text.

Barthes's theory regarding visual semiotics is in line with Saussure's theory. This is because Barthes further developed Saussure's theory. Saussure's semiotic theory is divided into two parts, the signifier and the signified, serves as the foundation for Barthes's theory. Barthes expanded upon this semiotic theory to the point where it became known as the "two orders of signification" (denotation, connotation) and myth. Connotation is defined as the meaning associated with an image beyond its obvious denotative level, whereas denotation is defined as the first and simplest level of meaning of an image. Myth refers to meanings that vary due to the influence of the surrounding social and cultural environment and prevailing views (Siti et al., 2022).

A visual semiotic approach enables the authors to read souvenirs as visual text, *rather than merely material objects*. The analysis is conducted through a systematic step-by-step procedure consisting of three stages: (1) identification of visual elements, (2) classification into semiotic levels (denotation, connotation, myth), and (3) interpretation of cultural and ideological meanings. The visual analysis parameters are explicitly defined to include color, typography, form (illustration), and composition (layout and spatial arrangement). These parameters serve as the basis for identifying how meaning is constructed visually within the object.

The study object can be determined through knowing the population and sample. Population itself can be understood as the whole objects that are going to be studied. Population includes both alive and non-living objects whose characteristics can be observed. Population consists of two different types, infinite population and finite population (Jailani et al., 2023).

The population of this study is every visual object in the form of souvenirs which are sold in the tourism destination of Ampel Village, and must contain religious and cultural visual elements of Ampel Village. The souvenirs come in various types, from religious clothing including ranging from children's clothing, keychains, and beads to cigarette pipes. A sample is a portion of a population that represents

the entire population (Jailani et al., 2023). This study uses purposive sampling technique because not all of the objects provided in Ampel Village can represent visual and culture characteristic of its area. Purposive sampling is a technique used to obtain a non-probability sample which has a standard or certain criteria after knowing the population’s characteristic (Jailani et al., 2023). The sampling criteria are defined *systematically* as follows: (1) the object must contain explicit religious symbols, (2) it must reflect visual and cultural characteristics of Ampel Village, (3) it must be produced and sold within the Ampel tourism area, (4) it must be visually accessible for documentation and analysis, and (5) it must be available during the 2025 observation period. The most representative sample for this condition is a children’s clothing with *Gapura Ampel* as its main design.

The primary data needed for this study can be compiled through observation, documentation, and literature study, while the secondary data can be found through literature study. To enhance interpretive validity, this study applies *theoretical triangulation* by comparing findings with existing literature on visual semiotics and religious symbolism, as well as visual references from the original Ampel site.

The analytical framework used in this study is summarized in Table 1, which outlines the semiotic levels, providing a transparent guide for the analysis process. This framework ensures that the interpretation is not purely subjective but grounded in a structured analytical model.

Table 1. Visual Semiotic Analysis Framework

Level	Focus	Guiding Question	Output
Denotation	Literal visual elements	What is visually shown?	Description of elements
Connotation	Cultural and symbolic meaning	What meanings are associated?	Cultural interpretation
Myth	Ideological meaning and beliefs	What ideology is reinforced?	Identified cultural myth

Source: Personal Archives

Result and Discussion

Object Description



Figure 1. Children’s Clothing
Source: Personal Archives

The children’s clothing as the study object can be seen on image 1, which is systematically documented visual artifact. This selected object is analyzed using Barthes’s visual semiotic theory, with the image serving as primary analytical evidence rather than mere illustration. Rather than merely describing visual elements, this study explicitly links each visual component in image 1 to the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, showing how each element contributes to a system of meaning. The study object is a children’s clothing with *Gapura Ampel* illustration as the main visual design or point of interest, as clearly identified and contextualized in the figure caption. Illustration is the art of drawing

used to visually convey a meaning or purpose (Savitri & Setiawan, 2018). Illustration in this study functions as a key semiotic unit within the analytical framework.

There are several typographies that are used along with the *Gapura Ampel* design. Typography is the science, art, or technique of arranging letter elements or text so that it is readable, conveys its meaning clearly, and possesses aesthetic value (Iswanto, 2023). This study, therefore, situates typography as part of the semiotic structure that supports ideological meaning, not merely aesthetic choice.

This study object also includes colors. Color is perceived before form is recognized, so it can be said that color is an essential element in design, because without color, the other elements can be said to be nonexistent (Listya, 2018). Color is often associated solely with aesthetics, yet upon closer examination, color is the first thing to engage the human senses (the sense of sight); this means that every color conveys an impression and represents a specific emotional identity, and for this reason, color can influence a person's response (Kholid et al., 2021). Color is analyzed not only as perception but as a visual sign that participates in meaning production within visual semiotics.

The study object shows a really distinguishable visual object of Ampel Village on the design. The *Gapura Ampel* is one of the most famous icons in Ampel Village. The gate design of the children's clothing is *Gapura Madhep* as its main focus. *Gapura Madhep* is depicted in a gold color. The background of this children's clothing is black. This study object includes typography besides the gate illustration. The typeface used for "SUNAN AMPEL" and "GAPURA AMPEL" (inside the gate illustration) is sans serif. "SUNAN AMPEL" is using Lemon Milk font, whereas "GAPURA AMPEL" is using Arial font. The other typography, which are "Wisata Ziarah" and "Surabaya" is using script typeface, while for the font used is Script MT Bold. All of those typographies also appear in gold color with double outline colored black and gold, except the "GAPURA AMPEL" typography that makes an appearance in black color without any outline. The model of this children's clothing is a short sleeve with extra-large size.

Gapura Madhep which placed on the center part of the cloth is intendedly used as a point of view due to its main selling point as the unique element from Ampel Village. The shape of *Gapura Madhep* is more likely high and not so wide. There are two ornaments shaped like flowers on each left and right part of the gate. Another ornament is placed on the upper part of the gate, tendril patterned horizontally. This gate is equipped by two elements like small buildings on the right and left sides. These additional elements are also included in the design of this children's clothing.

Analysis of the Study Object Based on Barthes Visual Semiotic Theory

The selected samples will be analyzed using Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics. Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics focuses on the analysis of levels of meaning, namely the denotative, connotative, and mythical levels.

Denotative meaning

Denotative meaning refers to the literal description of the object. Denotative meaning can be conveyed through a detailed descriptive explanation of what is depicted on the children's clothing. The analysis at this level identifies not only visual components but also their arrangement as a structured representation designed for reproducibility in souvenir production.

This children's clothing is screen-printed, black in color, and features key design elements in gold on the front center, extending from the chest to the abdomen area. The main design consists of typography and an illustration of a gate. Two types of typography are used: script and sans serif. The first typography, located at the very top, displays the text "Wisata Ziarah" in gold using a script style; the font used is Script MT Bold. The dominant typography on this children's clothing is located below the text "Wisata Ziarah." This typography reads "SUNAN AMPEL" in gold, using the Lemon Milk font, in a bold sans-serif style, accompanied by black and gold outlines, making it suitable for display text. The final typography is located at the very bottom, reading "Surabaya" in a bold script style. The font used is Script MT Bold. The font color is also gold. The placement of the "Surabaya" text, which overlaps with the gate image above it, requires an outline to enhance readability. The outline is black, followed

by gold. The selection of fonts used on this children’s clothing involved a search on the websites www.dafont.com and www.myfonts.com.

The gate located in the center of the clothing is the *Gapura Madhep*. This interpretation involves a process of matching the visuals on the clothing with the original visuals of the gates in Ampel Village, Surabaya, using systematically documented as visual references. The method used was to compare the children’s clothing with documentary photographs of the *Gapura Ampel* obtained through direct observation, treated as analytical data within the semiotic framework. The comparison between gate illustration with the original *Gapura Madhep* can be found on image 2, which is explicitly analyzed to demonstrate visual correspondences in form, proportion, and ornamentation rather than serving as mere illustration.



Figure 2. Comparison of the Gate Illustration with the Original *Gapura Madhep*

Source: Personal Archives

The *Gapura Madhep* features floral motifs on the right and left sides of the brick walls. A simple vine motif is clearly carved at the top of the gate, near the roof. The gate’s roof has projections on the right, center, and left sides. The left and right sections of the gate’s walls have a raised texture resembling a single vertical line in the center, accompanied by four diagonal lines arranged in pairs of two, with joined points at the top and bottom of the vertical line, creating shapes resembling a V and a Λ. The gate in this children’s clothing design appears slightly narrower in proportion compared to the original gate located in Ampel Village.

There is also visible the gate’s complementary architecture in the form of brick walls. There is a slight difference from the complementary architecture of the original structure. The complementary architecture on the original structure lacks a brick texture, as it has undergone a painting process, making it appear white and smooth. The placement of these complementary architectural elements is not far from the gate but rather directly adjacent to it, side by side, as they placed *Gapura Madhep* precisely at its center. All parts of the *Gapura Madhep* on this children’s clothing are rendered in a color matching the typography; gold.

The small text reading “GAPURA AMPEL” is neatly displayed above the gate in black, using the sans-serif font Arial, as clearly identified in the visual shown in image 3. This text does not actually appear on the *Gapura Madhep* itself, indicating a deliberate design addition that is analytically interpreted as an anchoring device within the semiotic framework. Image 3 is therefore explicitly referenced as analytical evidence to examine the relationship between text and image, rather than serving solely as illustration.



Figure 3. GAPURA AMPEL Sign

Source: Personal Archives

The background color chosen for this clothing is black, which is a neutral color. Black makes the gold in the visual elements of this children's clothing stand out more. This successfully makes the typography and the image of the gate on the children's clothing serve as the focal point or point of interest.

The overall denotative meaning of this children's clothing revolves around what the eye can perceive: the clothing features an image of the *Gapura Ampel*, known as the *Gapura Madhep*, in gold, set against a black background, complemented by script and sans-serif typography for the "Wisata Ziarah Sunan Ampel Surabaya" text, also in gold, printed using screen-printing techniques.

These elements at the denotative level function as straightforward representations of a place. Souvenirs operate as symbolic texts rather than neutral objects (Shen & Lai, 2022). This analysis, however, extends Shen & Lai's study by emphasizing that even at the denotative level, the selection and arrangement of visual elements suggest an intentional process of simplification and adaptation, is part of a commodification strategy that prioritizes clarity and replication in mass-produced souvenirs. Furthermore, the selection of children's clothing as the medium already indicates a shift from spatial representation to wearable representation, where meaning is designed to be instantly recognizable and consumable.

Connotative meaning

Connotative meaning does not merely identify objects based on what can be perceived by the senses. Connotative meaning involves cultural interpretation. Connotative meaning requires an in-depth exploration of the cultural elements associated with the visual components of the research object. The connotative meaning in this children's clothing is focused on the *Gapura Madhep* icon. The gate located in the center of the clothing can be classified as an icon because it shares similarities with the original gate found in Ampel Village. The gate icon carries a connotative meaning. The cultures playing a role in the interpretation of the gate are not limited to one; rather, there has been intercultural acculturation. These cultures include Javanese, Hindu, and Islamic traditions. The *Gapura Madhep* serves not only as an architectural element but also as a boundary marker between territories.

The term "*gapura*" itself is influenced by Islamic culture. The word "*gapura*" linguistically derives from the Arabic word "*ghafura*," which means forgiveness. However, *gapura* were not known in the Arab world during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, as no literary sources mention them. The concept of a *gapura*, or, in a broader context, a gate, is also unknown in modern Arab regions; no literature has been found regarding this. The form of the *gapura* at the Masjid al-Haram differs from that in Ampel Village; the *gapura* at the Masjid al-Haram is more akin to a door. This supports the findings of Enjelina, Azizah, and Romadhan (2025), who argue that symbols in religious tourism sites function as both spiritual markers and cultural branding tools. This study, however, extends their argument by showing how such symbols are recontextualized in everyday objects, shifting from spatial experience to visual consumption.

The term "*Madhep*" is derived from the Javanese language, meaning "facing." The gate is named as *Gapura Madhep* because it is the second gate in the sequence of the *Gapura Paduraksa*. There are five *Gapura Paduraksa*, each representing one of the pillars of Islam, but their names are adapted to Javanese culture. First gate is *Gapura Panyeksen*, second gate is *Gapura Madhep*, third gate is *Gapura Ngamal*, fourth gate is *Gapura Pasa*, and fifth gate is *Gapura Mungguh*. Each one of the gates has a symbolic meaning, influenced by many cultures. Those five gates resemble the "five pillars of Islam", they are *syahadat* (faith), which consist of two confession sentences that Allah is the only God and Muhammad is the messenger of God; *salat* (prayer), a daily activity to worship Allah; *zakat* (alms), giving an exact amount of wealth to the one who deserves; *sawm* (fasting), form of worship to refrain from eating, drinking, and all of the bad desires within a month from sunrise to sunset; *hajj* (pilgrimage), a holy activity to Mecca (Basundoro & Sofansyah, 2024).

The *Gapura Madhep* represents the second pillar of Islam; prayer. The word "*Madhep*" was chosen because when Muslims perform prayer, they have to worship while facing the One and Only God. The *Gapura Madhep* faces west, symbolizing the direction of the *qibla*. This is closely tied to the



second pillar of Islam, prayer, which requires a directional marker, as prayer must be performed facing the Kaaba.

The *Gapura Madhep* resembles the temples of the Majapahit Kingdom. This indicates that the *Gapura Madhep* also adopted Hindu culture during the Majapahit Kingdom era. Hindu culture is reflected not only in the gate’s form but also in the ornaments in it. These ornaments are formed through stylization or simplification of decorative motifs from the Majapahit era, which are characterized by vine-like plants. Vine-like plants symbolize fertility, whether it be the fertility of the land or the fertility of women (Basundoro & Sofansyah, 2024:27-31). Stylization is an approach in the visual arts that aims to depict an object or form in a highly distinctive and characteristic style. This makes the object look more beautiful and appealing without compromising its original shape or character (Putri et al., 2025). This children’s clothing is depicting those stylization ornaments as more simplified in the design. The transformation of architectural elements into simplified visual motifs reflects the commodification process identified by Shen and Lai (2022), where souvenirs translate complex cultural meanings into accessible and marketable forms. Another stylization is derived from the Majapahit emblem, the Surya Majapahit. The Surya Majapahit blends Hindu beliefs with indigenous beliefs from the Majapahit era (Adisukma et al., 2022). The Surya Majapahit emblem is shown in image 4, which is analytically referenced to examine the transformation of symbolic motifs within the design. The detailed analysis over the gate symbol is provided through table 2, ensuring a structured and transparent analytical framework rather than purely illustrative support.



Figure 4. Surya Majapahit Emblem
Source: Adisukma, 2019:30

Table 2. Analysis of the Connotative Meaning of the *Gapura Madhep* Ornaments

Ornament	Description	Meaning
	A stylized version of the Majapahit emblem, known as the Surya Majapahit. The final design resembles a flower with eight petals.	The stylized Majapahit emblem symbolizes the recognition upon the Majapahit Kingdom for the services given by the Majapahit king to <i>Sunan Ampel</i> for lending him the Ampel Denta area in 1420, which later became the largest center of Islamic missionary work in Surabaya.
		



A stylized depiction of the vine-like plants characteristic of the Majapahit Kingdom, featuring blooming flowers on the right, center, and left sides.

Stylized depictions of vine plants symbolize fertility during the Majapahit Kingdom. This fertility symbolizes both the fertility of the soil and women. Vines with blooming flowers can also be interpreted as fragrance or glory, reflecting the sincerity of the heart when facing (*madhep*) the One True God during prayer.

Source: Personal Archives

The architectural design featured on this children's clothing is depicted alongside a gate, rendered with a brick texture, even though in the original architecture the surface appears smooth and white, matching the color and texture of the gate. Semiotics can provide insights into the interpretation of architecture signs. Consequently, architecture can be understood as a spatial text with various connotations within its own codes (Prayoga & Yudhanto, 2025). This difference is analytically interpreted through visual comparison as an effort to evoke an authentic impression in viewers' imagination, since authenticity is often shaped by external perceptions rather than factual accuracy. The surrounding architectural design from the children's clothing is shown in image 5, which is explicitly referenced and examined as visual evidence to identify the transformation of texture and form within the design, rather than serving solely as illustration.



Image 5. Architecture of the Gate's Surroundings

Source: Personal Archives

Other elements found in these children's clothing include color and typography. The dominant gold color in the design of these children's clothing carries connotations of wealth, luxury, high value, and honor. This meaning is based on the color of jewelry, which is also gold, so it can be said that the color gold represents wealth, especially since gold is expensive and is often associated with the manifestation of luxury in the bourgeois lifestyle. The black background gives a simple impression but does not detract from the luxurious feel of the gold color. The overall tone is also simple due to the use of a monochromatic color scheme.

The typography on the children's clothing uses two styles: script and sans serif. The script-style typography appears in the text reading "*Wisata Ziarah.*" The script-style typography resembles handwriting with fluid, non-rigid strokes, which gives it a flexible appearance. An elegant and decorative impression also emerges from the script-style typography on this children's clothing because it looks dynamic and is enhanced by the gold color. Sans serif-style typography can be found in the text "*SUNAN AMPEL.*" The impression created by this sans serif-style is sharp and bold, reflected in its rigid and pointed lines.

The connotative meaning of this children's clothing when viewed as a whole, lies in the process of attempting to negotiate Islamic values within the Nusantara culture of that time through acculturation. The connotative meaning of this children's clothing is a representation of the cultural values that thrive in the practice of religious tourism in the Ampel area. Pilgrimage is often understood as a social and cultural activity deeply intertwined with daily life. The illustration of the *Gapura Ampel*

serves as a symbol of history, tradition, and the visitor experience, as the gate embodies deep religious significance and local identity. The dominance of gold evokes luxury, giving the children's clothing design a luxurious feel, while the black background conveys elegance, making the religious identity stand out attractively. The combination of bold sans-serif typography for the name "*Sunan Ampel*" and fluid script for the tourism elements conveys clarity and affirms the identity of a culturally rich religious tourism area.

The conclusion regarding the connotative meaning of these children's clothing relates to meanings rooted in cultural concepts. The clothing features the *Gapura Ampel* as their primary visual motif, which is regarded as a boundary marker and embodies rich cultural significance. The Islamic cultural element stems from the word "*gapura*" (*ghafura*: forgiveness) and the symbolic meaning of the second pillar of Islam, prayer (*salah*), hence the gate faces west toward the *qibla*. Javanese culture is reflected in the word "*Madhep*," meaning "to face." Hindu culture is reflected in the gate's temple-like form and the ornaments on the gate, which are derived from the Majapahit era. The dominant gold color conveys a sense of luxury. Script typography creates a fluid impression, while sans-serif typography creates a rigid impression.

This analysis critically shows that the symbol undergoes reduction and stylization when transferred into a design object, unlike previous study of Fauziah (2025), that focus on static architecture. This study synthesizes prior findings by demonstrating that symbolic meaning is not only preserved but selectively transformed to fit market-oriented design logic. More importantly, the transformation into children's clothing introduces a new layer of meaning, where religious symbols are adapted into simplified, playful, and approachable visuals suitable for younger audiences. This indicates that the target user (children) influences the degree of visual simplification, softness of form, and clarity of symbolism, which differs significantly from architectural or ritual contexts discussed in previous studies. Thus, the connotative level reveals not only cultural meaning but also design negotiation between authenticity and marketability.

Myth Meaning

Myth refers to ideological meaning that becomes naturalized. The meaning related to culture are developed into truths accepted and agreed upon by society. Myth meaning pertains to the ideology of cultural messages conveyed through connotative meanings.

These children's clothing feature design elements divided into two categories. The design elements contained in these children's clothing include illustrative elements in the form of a gate icon and typographic elements in the form of explanatory text for the illustrations, such as "*Wisata Ziarah*," "*SUNAN AMPEL*," "*GAPURA AMPEL*," and "*Surabaya*." Both elements carry their own myth meanings.

The gate in a mythological context can be interpreted as sacred, a symbol of the transition between the spiritual realm (sacred; a place of pilgrimage) and the secular realm (profane; public space). The gate can be considered such a symbol based on a shared ideology or belief that is widely accepted within the community, in this case, the community of Ampel Village.

The addition of the text "*GAPURA AMPEL*" at the top of the door in this children's clothing design serves to emphasize that the gate depicted is none other than the actual gate located in Ampel Village. The inclusion of the text "*Wisata Ziarah*," "*SUNAN AMPEL*," and "*Surabaya*" is seen as reinforcing this point and further clarifying that the gate depicted is associated with *Sunan Ampel*, thereby establishing it as a religious tourism site located in Ampel Village, Surabaya. This is the function of anchoring, where text, as a linguistic element, links ideological meaning to the visual object, ensuring the meaning perceived by the audience remains controlled.

The gate icon and typography on these children's clothing when viewed through the lens of mythical meaning, do not merely act as visual signs referencing Ampel Village. The gate icon and typography form a myth that represents the relationship between religion (Hinduism and Islam), regional identity (Ampel Village), and the commercialization of the area (religious tourist site). These myths are deeply attached in the ideology of the local Ampel community, so they are never questioned.

The design on this children's clothing incorporates many cultural elements that have blended together through a process of cultural acculturation. The roots of this acculturation lie in the missionary methods employed by *Sunan Ampel* when spreading Islam in Ampel Village. *Sunan Ampel* utilized several methods that emphasized intellectual engagement. The first method was one of renewal or dissemination through social interaction with the local community; *Sunan Ampel* then began to gradually introduce Islamic values. The second method was an intellectual approach through discussion, which was more suitable for the upper classes because they were more open minded, unlike the lower classes. Other methods used by *Sunan Ampel*, in addition to the two mentioned above, were those that utilized local culture. The first cultural method was the *Al-Hikmah* method, an Islamic da'wah approach tailored to the target audience. The second cultural method was the *Ummah* method, a classification system for educational levels suited to each community. The third cultural method involves the training, cultivation of cadres, and deployment of da'wah preachers. In addition to intellectual and cultural methods, *Sunan Ampel* employed methods such as the establishment of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the teaching of aspects of creed (*aqidah*) and worship (*ibadah*), the planning of the Demak Islamic Kingdom, and even through marriages between Islamic missionaries and the daughters of subordinate rulers of the Majapahit Kingdom. *Sunan Ampel's* method of spreading Islamic teachings was further supported by his teachings, commonly known as "*Moh Lima*." *Moh Lima* stands for *Moh Main* (no gambling), *Moh Mabuk* (no drunkenness), *Moh Madon* (no adultery), *Moh Madat* (no drugs), and *Moh Maling* (no stealing). The methods employed by *Sunan Ampel* ultimately led to a cultural acculturation that went largely unnoticed by the local community, as the approach used was subtle and entirely non-coercive (Mustaqim, 2022).

The Hindu-Javanese heritage reflected in the gate has nearly vanished. The Hindu-Javanese culture embodied in the gate has transitioned into Islamic culture. This is most evident in the gate's name itself: the *Gapura Madhep*, which is one of the gates in the *Gapura Paduraksa* complex in Ampel Village. The *Gapura Paduraksa* is a roofed gate resembling a temple, adopted from the Hindu Majapahit era. The word "*madhep*" reflects Javanese cultural heritage from the Majapahit period. The literal meaning of "*madhep*" is "facing," but *Sunan Ampel* later imbued it with an Islamic meaning, representing the second pillar of Islam: prayer. The *Gapura Paduraksa*, with its roof, doorframe, and carvings, is also a form of Hindu-Islamic cultural acculturation, not purely Hindu culture, because the existence of the *Gapura Paduraksa* was an effort by *Sunan Ampel* to adapt to the Hindu Majapahit culture that the people of Ampel Village at that time could not yet abandon. *Sunan Ampel* carried out this process of introducing Islamic culture through cultural acculturation without coercion, using a gradual approach, introducing Islamic values little by little, so that the acculturation went largely unnoticed by the community. This process, as also indicated by Enjelina et al. (2025), shows how religious symbols are continuously recontextualized to support both spiritual and cultural narratives. This study, however, reveals an additional layer, where such symbols are further transformed into commodities within tourism culture.

The design on the children's clothing incorporates several messages that have been packaged to appear natural. The first message is that all elements associated with *Sunan Ampel* are icons worthy of being sold and displayed. This assumption comes from the fact that *Sunan Ampel* is the central figure upon whom Ampel Village is founded. The second message relates to the typical souvenirs commonly obtained during a pilgrimage, suggesting that the pilgrimage can be symbolically encapsulated in the design of children's clothing, transforming it into a child-friendly religious tourism experience. The third message is that incorporating Islamic religious symbols (in this case, the distinctive elements of Ampel Village considered rich in Islamic values) onto children's merchandise is appropriate.

The conclusion regarding the mythical significance of these children's clothing includes everything already regarded as a truth or ideology. The resulting ideology is that society is able to accept Islam that has been localized through a process of acculturation. The gate is sacred and functions as a marker of the boundary between the sacred and the secular, where the Javanese-Hindu culture it once contained has nearly faded and been replaced by Islamic culture subtly instilled by *Sunan Ampel*. Anchorage in the typography of "*Wisata Ziarah Sunan Ampel Surabaya*" functions as a

mechanism for controlling meaning, ensuring that the interpretation received by viewers remains consistent, specifically referring to the gate (*gapura*) located at the *Sunan Ampel* tourist site. The meanings embedded within the gate and the typography are understood as representing a relational intersection between Islam and Hinduism, as well as reflecting regional identity and the commercialization of the area. In line with Bedeau (2014) this demonstrates how symbols and text work together to construct and normalize religious identity within public discourse.

The overall design package of children's clothing conveys that elements associated with *Sunan Ampel* are appropriate for commodification, that pilgrimage activities are child-friendly, and that the incorporation of Islamic religious symbols into children's products is perceived as acceptable and normalized. The elements that appear "ordinary" in a design, actually contain a bias toward a particular value. By understanding the alternative meanings that can emerge in a communication practice, the process of selecting the present imagery will become more thoughtful (Gunawan, 2025).

This analysis deepens Barthes' framework showing how myth operates within consumer goods, by naturalizing ideology within everyday objects, making contingency appear eternal (Barthes, 1972). Compared to Bedeau (2014), which focuses on institutional identity, this study reveals how ideology is reproduced through informal consumer products, this analysis directly responds to the gap identified in previous studies. Shen and Lai (2022) highlight the symbolic nature of souvenirs, and Fauziah (2025) demonstrates layered meanings in religious visuals from static architecture, meanwhile this study shows how such meanings are simplified, reproduced, and naturalized within consumer goods. The myth constructed in these children's clothing reflects not only religious identity but also the integration of spirituality, culture, and market logic. Additionally, the shift into children's clothing reframes myth into a form of early cultural introduction, where religious identity is subtly internalized through everyday use rather than formal religious practice. This demonstrates that commodification does not only commercialize symbols but also redistributes ideological meaning across different age groups and contexts. Thus, myth in this object operates as a mechanism of ideological normalization through design.

Synthesis of Findings

The children's clothing features an illustration of the *Gapura Ampel* as its main element. Its denotation depicts a gate structure with distinctive architectural ornamentation. The gate on a connotative level serves as a symbol of the transition from the secular realm to the sacred realm. A gate in the context of pilgrimage or religious tourism is not merely a physical boundary but also a symbolic boundary between everyday life and spiritual experience.

The gate at the mythical level serves as a symbol that refers to the idea that the spiritual journey has a clear point of entry. Entering Ampel is positioned as an act that holds both religious and historical significance. The acculturation of Javanese-Hindu culture in the *Gapura Madhep* have nearly vanished and been replaced by Islamic culture. The word "*madhep*" means "to face," and *Sunan Ampel* subsequently imbued it with the Islamic meaning of the second pillar of Islam. This process of cultural acculturation was carried out by *Sunan Ampel* without coercion, through the method of gradually introducing Islamic values, so that the acculturation went largely unnoticed by the community.

The denotation of color in the gate object is gold. The connotation of the color gold serves as a marker of honor and the sanctity of the place. The typographic denotation is the text "*Wisata Ziarah Sunan Ampel Surabaya*." The connotation of the script typography in the text "*Wisata Ziarah*" and "*Surabaya*" conveys a flexible and dynamic nuance, while the sans-serif typography in the text "*Sunan Ampel*" conveys a firm and sharp nuance. This children's clothing design thus positions Ampel as the gateway to a religious experience.

The subject of this study exhibits a consistent pattern of visual representation. Religious symbolic signs in Ampel Village souvenirs function as a representational system that generates religious meaning through the process of visual semiotics. Roland Barthes, in his study of visual semiotics, states that visual signs not only convey literal meaning (denotation) but also generate cultural and ideological meanings (connotation and myth). Religious signs on Ampel Village souvenirs

appear through various visual elements, such as illustrations of the Ampel area's gate and the text "*Wisata Ziarah Sunan Ampel Surabaya.*" These elements denotatively are merely images or text; however, connotatively, they form representations of the spirituality and identity of the Islamic pilgrimage site.

These elements are found in the illustration of the *Gapura Ampel* and the text "*Wisata Ziarah Sunan Ampel Surabaya,*" which demonstrate how text functions as a sign that reinforces the religious identity of the area, as already indicated by the illustration. Souvenirs thus serve not only as mementos but also as a medium for representing the religious identity of Ampel Village.

The modern aspects of souvenirs are created through fast and efficient techniques such as screen printing, resulting in simplified and easily reproducible designs. This process shifts religious meaning from deep spiritual experience into visual symbols that are quickly recognized by tourists. As a result, religious symbols become part of tourism commodities, showing a transformation from sacred meaning into consumable products. Religious meaning in the context of modernity is no longer built solely through deep spiritual experiences but also through the visualization of symbols that are quickly recognizable to tourists.

The culture represented in Ampel souvenirs reflects hybridity, combining Islamic, Javanese, and Hindu elements. This hybridity originates from the historical spread of Islam by Sunan Ampel, which adapted to existing local cultures rather than replacing them. These cultural layers are still visible in the visual symbols used in souvenirs today. This cultural diversity is evident in various visual symbols in the souvenir itself, such as Islamic culture reflected in the religious function of the *Gapura Ampel* as a symbol of prayer activities; Hindu culture manifested in the form of the Ampel gates; and Javanese culture evident in the naming of the "*Madhep*" gate, derived from the Javanese language.

Ampel's signature souvenirs in practice, frame the consumption of goods as participation in cultural preservation. Visitors often perceive buying souvenirs as part of the pilgrimage experience, even associating it with religious merit. This reinforces the idea that commercial activities are embedded within cultural and religious practices.

This finding supports Barthes' theory that visual signs are never neutral but always carry ideological meaning. Ampel souvenirs function as a semiotic system where meaning is produced through denotation, connotation, and myth. Modern production processes introduce commodification, where religious symbols gain economic value alongside their cultural and spiritual meanings. The presence of diverse cultural elements indicates that Ampel Village's identity is hybrid; a blend of Islamic, Javanese, and Hindu cultures, which ultimately shapes the image of the Ampel area as a unique religious tourism destination.

This study integrates these levels into a cohesive understanding of how meaning is constructed, transformed, and circulated through design. It shows that meaning is not static but continuously reshaped through simplification, reproduction, and commodification. The use of children's clothing as a medium is especially important, as it transforms religious symbols into wearable and accessible forms, allowing early exposure to cultural identity while aligning with tourism consumption. This supports the argument that commodification reshapes not only form but also meaning, aligning with contemporary visual culture dynamics. This study contributes by explicitly linking hybridity with design practice, rather than treating it as purely historical context.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that commodification is not merely an economic process but also a semiotic one, where meaning is continuously recontextualized through design adaptation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the visual design of children's souvenirs in Ampel Village operates as a complex semiotic system that extends far beyond aesthetic representation. Through the interplay of denotation, connotation, and myth, elements such as the *Gapura Ampel*, gold color, and typographic choices construct a layered meaning that positions Ampel not only as a physical site but as a symbolic

gateway to spiritual experience. These visual signs systematically guide audiences toward a shared interpretation, reinforcing the religious identity of the site while simultaneously embedding historical narratives of cultural acculturation, particularly the transformation of Javanese-Hindu elements into Islamic meanings.

This research contributes theoretically by showing that the meaning of religious symbols is not fixed but continuously reshaped by social, cultural, and economic contexts. The shift from sacred symbol to commodity, as seen in the mass production of souvenirs, indicates that religious experience in contemporary pilgrimage tourism is increasingly mediated through visual consumption. Souvenirs, practically, function as both carriers of religious meaning and instruments of commercialization, where purchasing practices are framed as acts of cultural preservation and even spiritual participation.

The findings also highlight the hybrid nature of Ampel Village's cultural identity, formed through the intersection of Islamic, Javanese, and Hindu influences. This hybridity is not merely historical but actively reproduced through visual representations in souvenirs, which selectively emphasize certain cultural elements while obscuring others. The identity of Ampel as a religious tourism destination is constructed through an ongoing negotiation between tradition, modernity, and market forces.

This study, by situating these findings within Barthes' framework of visual semiotics, explicitly demonstrates that popular visual culture, including children's clothing, plays a significant role in shaping how religious meanings are produced, circulated, and normalized. This research matters because it provides critical insight into how religious symbolism is transformed in everyday consumer objects, revealing broader implications for the understanding of religion, identity, and commodification in contemporary society.

This study, however, is limited by its focus on a single case study and a specific type of souvenir, which may not fully represent the diversity of visual expressions in other contexts. These limitations suggest that further research could expand the scope by comparing different media, locations, or audience groups to strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

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