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Theology of Visual Sacredness in the Digital Age: Negotiating Iconography, Identity, and Faith in Contemporary Islamic Art Exhibitions

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Abstract

With a focus on iconography, identity, and digitization, this study looks at the theology of visual sacredness in modern Islamic art in the digital age. The primary focus is on how representations of calligraphy, geometry, and light are exhibited as religious symbols that draw attention to the elements of tanzīh, taqdīs, and syi'ar. Curatorial publications of global exhibitions like the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah supply the primary data for this investigation; it adopts a descriptive Qualitative approach: The Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival and Letters of Light at the Louvre Abu Dhabi provide secondary information derived from scholarly papers, news coverage, and online records. Analysis uses the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana paradigm; source triangulation is used to verify validity. The results show that modern art's use of Qur'anic imagery is not just sustained but also renewed by new media including multimedia installations, augmented reality, and virtual reality. The discourse of identity shows the conflict of Muslim artists with regard to their interior faith and the demands of the worldwide art market, with Strong emphasis on this among Muslim viewers is non-Muslim audience attention on appearance. Digitalization increases accessibility to sacredness yet raises questions about the fading of the aura of holy objects in digital forms. Modern Islamic art serves as a forum for public theology, fusing tradition, belief, and modernity, according to this study.

Keywords: Theology, Visual Sacredness, Iconography, Identity, Faith, Art Exhibitions

Introduction

Art in Islam has a complex role which is between the requirements of aniconism which is against the use of figurative representation and the push for aesthetic expression that has seen the development of the calligraphic, geometric, and arabesque decorative traditions (Sauri et al., 2022; Zahra Shahir, 2022). This dialectic is what puts Islamic art in a very unique category which although it is sacred does not use human or animal figures to present that which is divine but instead uses abstract which also has a theologic value. This pattern which

is a visual identity for the Islamic tradition is different from what we see in other religions while at the same time it has been a topic of great debate in the public sphere.

Arabic calligraphy is the base through which we see the relationship between revealed text and the visual sacredness (Qais, 2024). That which quotes verses from the Qur'án also serves as decor but at the same time it is a si'ar which in its beauty preserves the words of God. We see in the tradition of geometry and arabesque a support to this aesthetic structure which present what seems to be infinite patterns as symbols of transcendence. This puts forth the idea of tanzíh which is the theme of God's great beyond what man can put into form also which includes taqdís that which which sanctifies everything related to revelation (Hoover, 2022; Polinsky, 2022). Classical theologians such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabi further grounded these concepts by describing divine beauty and transcendence as manifestations that can only be approached through symbolic signs rather than direct representation. Comparable theological frameworks appear in Christian iconography, where light, sacred texts, and symbolic forms function as mediators of divine presence within liturgical space.

Visual sacredness in this case is not what we may term a work of art but an outgrowth of doctral faith. Controversial is the issue when iconography and visual representation move into more figurative fields (Awni et al., 2022; Corsini, 2021). We see between the lines of orthodoxy which puts out against figurative representations and artists which put forth the cause of free expression which is a reoccurring issue in the history of Islamic art. Also at issue is Orientalism which looks at Islamic art through a Western eye as at once exotic and forbidden. This plays out that which we term visual sacredness is not only defined by religious text but also by social, political and global cultural forces which in turn play with its boundaries (Cunha, 2023; Lee, 2023; Wijnia, 2022).

A in present time we see that which traditional Muslim artists began to put into practice new media like installation art, photography, video, and digital art which they use to present the sacred. Calligraphy is included in multi media installings, geometry is made present with the use of light tech and Qur'anic symbols are put into digital settings. These changes show that what we think of as visual sacred in classical settings is in fact an ever evolving thing which grows with the use of technology and global discussion (Odin, 2024; Ping, 2024). Also today we see that Islamic art exhibitions are stages where the play between faith, art, and modernity is very much at the fore.

Several reports present that this trend is alive and well. In Jeddah at the Islamic Arts Biennale early Islamic artifacts are put forth with current works on a large scale, at the Louvre Abu Dhabi's Letters of Light Qur'anic manuscripts are put together with the Bible and Torah and in the Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival hundreds of calligraphy, murals, and multi media works from which many countries partake are featured. The British Museum in its Inspired by the East exhibit looks at the relationship between the Islamic world and the West which in turn brings up issues of Orientalism. This group of exhibits present that which was once marginal practice of contemporary Islamic art is in fact a part of the global discussion on aesthetics, identity and faith (Qatawneh Rababah, 2021; Sankrityayan, 2021).

In the digital age we see a new face of what it means to experience the sacred visually. Virtual exhibitions, AR/VR, and digital platforms such as Google Arts Culture which present the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha or the Albukhary Gallery at the British Museum to the world online are at our disposal. Digitalization brings in the possibility of making access to these works for all but also brings up issues of how does one experience the sacred without the physical element. In this new digital reality the theology of the visual sacred has to address the fact that the aura of sacred objects is being reproduced on screens and experienced by a global audience.

In that which pertains to Muslim audiences the sacred is at the fore, regarding non-Muslim audiences they tend to see in them aesthetic or cultural expressions. The issue of Orientalism is still present but what we have now is a more positive spin , which is that of a progressive

cultural exchange also we see in Jeddah, Sharjah, Doha, and Jakarta the shift of the Islamic art center of gravity to the Global South. In this setting the theology of the visual and the sacred is a strategic tool to reinforce Islamic identity at the same time that it broadens the scope for interfaith and cross cultural dialogue in the digital age (Hennessey, 2021; Pourmahmoud, 2024; Shelkovaia, 2025).

This issue at hand is that which of which we should approach present day Islamic visual sacredness from a theological stand point instead of what is put forth by aesthetic principles or art anthropology. In the academic field we see that which studies connect iconography, identity and faith in current art exhibits can bring to light how classical Islamic practices transform into modern and digital age. This is a key issue in putting forth that which Islamic art is not to be seen only as an aesthetic thing but as a live, dynamic theological space which plays a large role in the global discussion of religion, culture, and technology.

Literature Review

This study explores how Islamic visual sacredness is negotiated in contemporary art exhibitions in the digital age, connecting iconography, identity, and faith. The analytical framework uses Catherine Bell's theory of ritualisation, which views ritual as a symbolic power practice, alongside Eric Hobsbawm's concept of *invented tradition*, emphasizing the preservation and modification of traditions in line with social contexts (Bell, 1988; Hijjas, 2024). Both are complemented by Islamic theological concepts of *tanzīh* (transcendence), *taqdīs* (sanctity), and *syi'ar* (religious symbols) to examine contemporary visual art as an arena where faith and culture converge through digital mediums.

Fazilat, Mousavi, Khorrami, and Samangani (2022) study the role of embodied cultural capital in the development of social capital and spiritual health from a religious perspective. Using an analytical approach, the study found that cultural capital manifested in social practices strengthens spiritual health and community cohesion. This article differs from the current research by focusing on spiritual health, while the present study emphasizes the visual sacredness of Islamic art in the context of digital exhibitions.

Ju (2022), through a study on the art of Silk Worm Worship in medieval China, highlights the tendency toward polytheistic syncretism in the integration of the three major religions. This research uses a historical-cultural analysis to affirm that religious art plays a crucial role in shaping collective societal understanding. This article is relevant as it discusses art as a theological medium; however, it differs by focusing on contemporary Islamic iconography in digital curation spaces, rather than traditional Chinese polytheistic art.

Qatawneh and Rababah (2021) compare the reflection of *'aqidah* (faith) in Islamic and Western art through a comparative analytical approach. Their study finds that Islamic art is rooted in transcendence and symbolic sacredness, whereas Western art emphasizes figurative representation and aesthetic freedom. The relevance of this article lies in its epistemological foundation on how faith shapes art; however, this study takes a different path by focusing on contemporary Islamic art in the digital era as a negotiation of iconography and identity, rather than a normative comparison between two major traditions.

Yessekeyeva and Venbrux (2021) examine the works of Kazakh artist Anvar Musrepov, emphasizing the dimension of ritual and ritualisation present in his artistic practice. Through art and religion studies, the research concludes that contemporary art can serve as a space for religious expression that intertwines aesthetic experiences with faith. This article shares a methodological proximity with the current study as both connect contemporary art and religion. However, the present study expands its focus by analyzing Islamic visual sacredness in international exhibitions and digital platforms.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to deeply explore how Islamic visual sacredness is represented, negotiated, and transformed in contemporary art exhibitions (Weyant, 2022). This approach was selected because it is necessary to understand both the aesthetic and theological phenomena, which cannot be measured quantitatively but must be understood through the interpretation of symbols, curatorial practices, and public reception. Qualitative analysis allows the study to capture the relationship between faith, iconography, and digital modernity as a complex social reality. The data sources consist of both primary and secondary data that complement each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2020). Primary data includes curatorial documents from international exhibitions such as the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah, *Letters of Light* at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival, which showcase calligraphy, geometry, and Qur'anic-themed multimedia installations. Secondary data is obtained from academic literature on Islamic art, visual sacredness theology, religious aesthetics, as well as journalistic reports and digital documentation related to Islamic art exhibitions. Data collection is conducted through a systematic literature review, exploring relevant written and digital sources to support the analytical framework.

Data analysis is carried out using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which includes the stages of data collection, condensation, presentation, and verification (Miles et al., 2020). Each finding is reviewed cyclically to ensure consistency in interpreting the representation of visual sacredness. The validity of the research is maintained through source triangulation, comparing data from curatorial documents, academic literature, and digital documentation (Flick, 2022). This approach ensures that the research findings are not only descriptive but also critical, with academic rigor that can contribute to enriching the discourse on Islamic theology and contemporary art.

Results and Findings

The Qur'an and Art: The Theological Foundation of Visual Sacredness

Art in Islam gains its theological legitimacy through the Qur'anic texts, which outline meanings of beauty, symbols, and *syi'ar* as signs of Divine power. Visual sacredness does not merely emerge as an aesthetic outcome but is rooted in doctrine, positioning beauty as an integral part of faith. Qur'anic verses affirm the relationship between God's creation, religious symbols, and artistic expressions that guide humans towards contemplation of transcendence. Classical and contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an serve as essential foundations for reading Islamic art as a representation of visual sacredness.

Table 1. Qur'anic Verses on Art and Visual Sacredness (Authors Own)

No	Verse	Translation
1	QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:138	"The dye of Allah; and who is better than Allah in dye? It is He whom we worship."
2	QS. An-Nahl [16]:125	"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best."
3	QS. Al-Imran [3]:190	"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and day are signs for those of understanding."
4	QS. Al-A'raf [7]:31	"O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid and eat and drink, but do not be excessive."
5	QS. Fussilat [41]:53	"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth."

QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:138 emphasizes the concept of *sibghatallah* (the dye of Allah) as a representation of the Divine identity that colors all of life. Ibn Kathir interprets this verse as symbolizing the totality of faith that marks humans with the Divine color, not just worldly attributes (Kathir, 2018). Al-Razi views *sibghah* as an aesthetic declaration that Allah's creation is the most perfect manifestation of beauty (Al-Razi, 2012). Hamka interprets it as a spiritual process where art and visual expressions linked to divine values become part of worship (Hamka, 2012). Thus, this verse legitimizes works of art rooted in faith, interpreting them as a sacred dye from Allah Himself.

QS. An-Nahl [16]:125 provides a foundation for art as a medium for *da'wah* (religious outreach). Jalalain interprets *hikmah* (wisdom) as contextual, while Thabathabai emphasizes using a gentle, aesthetic method to deliver the message (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015). Quraish Shihab views this verse as encouragement to use communication mediums that are suitable for the cultural context, including visual art (Shihab, 2015). Tafsir Maraghi adds that art can be an effective cultural *da'wah* tool because it touches the emotional and imaginative dimensions (Maraghi, 1910). Thus, Islamic art is not only beautiful but also serves as an instrument of *da'wah* filled with wisdom.

QS. Al-Imran [3]:190 highlights the role of the creation of the universe as signs (*ayat kauniyah*) that direct humans toward theological reflection. Ibn Kathir (2018) emphasizes that the patterns of the heavens and earth are visual symbols that guide the recognition of the oneness of Allah. Al-Razi (2012) interprets the order of the cosmos as Divine geometry that inspires artistic patterns in Islamic architecture and ornamentation. Necipoğlu, in her contemporary studies, even connects this verse with the legitimacy of Islamic geometry theology (Necipoğlu, 2023). Islamic geometric art, therefore, is not merely decoration but an extension of cosmic verses presented in visual form.

QS. Al-A'raf [7]:31 connects aesthetics with spirituality by instructing people to wear beautiful clothing when worshipping. Tafsir Jalalain emphasizes the aspects of modesty and beauty that support the sanctity of worship (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015). Ibn Kathir views it as an encouragement to connect outer beauty with inner purity. Hamka (2012) interprets this verse as evidence that Islam does not reject beauty but directs beauty toward the path of worship. Islamic visual art, with its ornaments and calligraphy, can be interpreted as "visual clothing" for mosques and public spaces, enhancing the sacred atmosphere.

QS. Fussilat [41]:53 affirms the concept of Allah's signs that can be read in the horizons and within oneself. Thabathabai emphasizes that these cosmic and humanistic signs function as windows to the truth of revelation (Thabathabai, 1991). Zamakhshari sees this verse as the epistemological basis for symbols in Islam, where visual signs are pathways to faith (Al-Zamakhshari, 1995). Quraish Shihab (2015) adds that art can be one form of these signs, bringing spiritual experiences to modern humans. Thus, visual sacredness in contemporary art has theological legitimacy as it serves as a reminder of Allah's presence through artistic symbols.

The above verses show that the Qur'an not only provides moral guidance but also opens space for aesthetic expression that reinforces faith. Classical interpretations such as those by Ibn Kathir and Zamakhshari emphasize the symbolic and sign dimensions, while modern interpretations by Shihab and Hamka emphasize the social-cultural functions of art. This combination demonstrates the continuity of epistemology that art can be a *syi'ar* that conveys messages of faith while beautifying public spaces.

Within the framework of visual sacredness, the interpretations of scholars reveal that Islamic art cannot be separated from its theological dimension. Qur'anic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and architectural ornaments are manifestations of the idea that beauty is a path to

God. Sacredness is not only found in sacred texts but also in how those texts are manifested in visual forms that touch the human senses.

Thus, art in Islam has a strong theological foundation from the Qur'an, classical tafsir, and modern interpretations. The visual sacredness we observe in contemporary art exhibitions cannot be detached from this long tradition; rather, it is a dialectical continuation of the teachings of revelation translated into aesthetic spaces.

Manifestation of Visual Sacredness, Identity, and Digitalization in Contemporary Islamic Art

Contemporary Islamic art exhibitions in the global era demonstrate how visual sacredness is not only preserved but also transformed through the mediums of iconography, identity negotiation, and digital technology. Beauty, derived from revelation, is articulated in the forms of calligraphy, geometry, and light; Muslim artists negotiate their identities on the global stage; while the digitalization of exhibitions changes how audiences experience sacredness. This phenomenon shows that contemporary Islamic art is not just an aesthetic artifact, but an arena for public theology where faith, culture, and modernity interact.

Table 2. Dimensions of Visual Sacredness, Identity, and Digitalization in Contemporary Islamic Art Exhibitions (Authors Own)

No	Dimension	Exhibitions/Cases	Theological Manifestation	Global Notes
1	Iconography (calligraphy, geometry, light)	Letters of Light (Louvre Abu Dhabi), Islamic Arts Biennale Jeddah, Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival	*Taqdīs* (sanctity of revelation), *Tanzīh* (transcendence through infinite patterns), *Syi'ar* (Qur'anic symbols)	Iconography understood across religions, emphasizing the universality of sacred texts
2	Identity (artist & audience)	Islamic Arts Biennale (authentic narratives), Inspired by the East (British Museum)	Negotiation between "Islamic art" vs. "contemporary art with Islamic elements"	Politics of representation: Muslim artists bridging faith & global art market
3	Digitalization of sacredness	Google Arts & Culture (MIA Doha), VR/AR exhibitions Sharjah, 3D tour Albukhary Gallery British Museum	Sacredness experienced through screens; sacred aura reproduced digitally	Democratization of access, but risk of desanctification when sacredness is reduced to visual data

Iconography is at the core of visual sacredness in contemporary Islamic art. Calligraphy remains the most prominent sacred symbol but appears in new mediums such as light installations, digital projections, and multimedia works. The Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah emphasizes the continuity between early Islamic artifacts and contemporary installations, so that iconography no longer merely functions as decoration but also as a cross-temporal narrative demonstrating the continuity of faith. Sacredness is presented visually, embodying *taqdīs* of revelation in a modern artistic format (Antonova, 2023).

Geometry and arabesque have also transformed from mere architectural decoration into immersive experiences. Exhibitions in Sharjah showcased geometric patterns through light technology and augmented reality, giving the impression that audiences were entering a cosmic space. This representation affirms *tanzīh*, the concept that Divine transcendence can only be hinted at through infinite patterns. Contemporary geometric art thus expands the

sacred language of Islam, bringing classical patterns into a new dimension that can be experienced multisensorially (Azari, 2023; Makovicky, 2021; Shomely, 2024).

Letters of Light at the Louvre Abu Dhabi presents Qur'anic manuscripts alongside the Bible and the Torah, creating an interfaith iconography that emphasizes the sacredness of sacred texts. This juxtaposition shows the universality of revelation while presenting a form of cultural diplomacy connecting Islam, Christianity, and Judaism within a curatorial space. In this context, visual sacredness functions as a medium for interfaith dialogue, expanding the meaning of *syi'ar* not only for the Muslim community but also for a global encounter.

Negotiation of identity is the next inevitable dimension (Kancal-Ferrari, 2022). Muslim artists often find themselves at the crossroads of wanting to assert the Islamic nature of their works while needing to be accepted within the global art discourse. On one hand, Qur'anic symbols and calligraphic patterns bind their work to faith. On the other hand, curatorial strategies place their works within the framework of "contemporary art," which demands aesthetic freedom. Artistic identity, therefore, is not static but is continuously negotiated between faith, the art market, and international audiences.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences influence this negotiation. Muslim audiences often read the works as representations of faith, such as interpreting digital calligraphy as a form of visual *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Non-Muslim audiences tend to emphasize aesthetics, appreciating the harmony of geometry without linking it to Divine transcendence. Exhibitions such as *Inspired by the East* at the British Museum showcase this tension, where Islamic art can be read as a religious expression or as a product of Orientalism. The politics of reception become an essential part of determining the identity of the work on the global stage.

In the context of political representation, contemporary Islamic art shows ambivalence. On one hand, it asserts authenticity through sacred symbols; on the other hand, it is positioned as a commodity in the global art market. Muslim artists often balance both demands, borrowing the global language while maintaining their faith. This reinforces that visual sacredness is not only about form but also about who interprets it and in what context it is presented (Souza, 2021).

The digital era adds a new layer to the experience of visual sacredness. Platforms such as Google Arts & Culture provide access to the Museum of Islamic Art Doha's collection, allowing global audiences to view Qur'anic manuscripts in high detail. VR/AR exhibitions in Sharjah create immersive spaces where sacredness is projected into the virtual world. This transformation affirms that sacredness can now be experienced without physical presence, though the risk of reducing meaning increases when sacredness is treated merely as visual data.

Digitalization brings a positive side in the form of democratizing access. Audiences from around the world can now see collections that were previously limited to specific museum spaces. However, on the other hand, the sacred experience, which is usually associated with the aura of the original object, is replaced by digital simulations. This debate opens up a theological question: does sacredness remain present in virtual form, or is it reduced to mere aesthetic experience? This phenomenon demands a new reflection on the theology of visual sacredness in the digital age.

Contestation also arises when Islamic art is displayed in digital formats for non-Muslim audiences. Some argue that digitalization has the potential to "secularize" sacredness, blurring the meaning of faith. However, for others, digitalization becomes a new way to spread *syi'ar* of Islam, reaching a global audience with a universal visual language. This dialectic shows that digitalization is not merely a technical medium but also an arena for ongoing theological negotiation (Xia, 2023; Yeom, 2021).

Thus, iconography, identity, and digitalization form the core triangle in the manifestation of visual sacredness in contemporary Islamic art. Calligraphy, geometry, and light function as

symbols of transcendence; Muslim artists negotiate their identities on the global stage; while digital technology expands the sacred experience to a wider audience. The entire phenomenon shows that the theology of visual sacredness in Islam is not a static tradition but a dynamic praxis that lives within the contexts of modernity and globalization.

Discussion

Visual sacredness in contemporary Islamic art exhibitions demonstrates that artistic practices can be read as a form of ritualisation within Catherine Bell's (1988) framework. Calligraphy, geometry, and light, presented in curatorial spaces, are not merely decoration but symbolic performativity that asserts theological authority. By presenting symbols of revelation in modern visual mediums, contemporary art creates new rituals that expand the experience of faith from worship spaces to the global aesthetic arena.

Eric Hobsbawm's concept of *invented tradition* helps explain how classical Islamic iconography is re-institutionalized in contemporary formats. For example, the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah displays early Islamic artifacts alongside digital installations to affirm the continuity of sacredness. This practice reinforces that tradition is not static but recreated in response to new socio-political contexts. Contemporary Islamic art thus showcases the dialectic between preservation and innovation, where Qur'anic visual heritage is revitalized in a global language.

The dimension of *tanzīh* in Islamic theology finds its relevance in geometric patterns and arabesque that come alive in digital spaces. The endless representation of geometry becomes a symbol of Allah's transcendence that remains beyond human reach. When these patterns are visualized through AR/VR technology, global audiences are presented with a multisensory experience that still hints at human limitations in comprehending divinity (Lacarcel & Huete, 2023; Poerio & Stengler, 2025). Thus, the theology of transcendence finds its articulation in immersive art projected through modern technology.

The aspect of *taqdīs* is also evident in Qur'anic calligraphy, which is central to many international exhibitions. *Letters of Light* at the Louvre Abu Dhabi places Qur'anic manuscripts alongside the Bible and the Torah, not to diminish their sanctity but to affirm the sacredness of the texts as revelation. This placement displays the theology of sanctity in an interfaith format, showing how contemporary art can serve as a medium for cultural diplomacy and global *da'wah*.

Negotiation of identity in contemporary Islamic art shows that *syi'ar* (religious symbols) are not only internal symbols for the Muslim community but also political statements of representation. Muslim artists using Qur'anic iconography find themselves in a dual position: affirming their faith while participating in the global art market. Within the framework of ritualisation theory, this act demonstrates symbolic strategies that unite faith and aesthetics, creating new rituals that are not confined to spaces of worship alone but also to international exhibition spaces (Ju, 2022).

Globalization shows that the reception of Islamic art is not singular. Muslim audiences emphasize the sacred dimension, while non-Muslim audiences tend to view it as exotic aesthetics (Wijnia, 2022). This contestation aligns with Bell's view of ritual as a site of power: Islamic art becomes a locus where claims of sacredness, culture, and aesthetics collide. Thus, contemporary Islamic art is not only a medium for faith but also a global arena of power where Eastern traditions meet Western discourse.

Digitalization presents new challenges for the theology of sacredness. The aura of sacred objects, as theorized by Walter Benjamin, is now reproduced on screens. Platforms like Google Arts & Culture and 3D tours provide democratized access but also open the risk of desanctification. However, within the context of *invented tradition*, digitalization can be seen

as a new tradition created to maintain the relevance of sacredness in the technological era. Visual sacredness does not vanish but is mediated anew through technology, allowing faith to be experienced in the virtual world.

Fazilat et al. (2022) emphasize cultural capital as a means to strengthen spiritual health and social cohesion. In comparison, this study shows a shift in focus: from social practice to visual practice. While Fazilat highlights embodied cultural capital, this study emphasizes visual sacred capital, which is spiritual legitimacy built through iconography in digital art spaces. Both demonstrate that religious capital can take different forms depending on the social context.

Ju (2022), Qatawneh & Rababah (2021), and Yessekeyeva & Venbrux (2021) affirm that religious art functions as a theological medium, whether in Chinese traditions, Islamic-Western comparisons, or contemporary Kazakh art. This research differs by focusing on contemporary Islamic art in the digital era, emphasizing Qur'anic iconography, identity negotiation, and the transformation of sacredness through virtual exhibitions. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in integrating ritualisation theory and *invented tradition* with Islamic theology to read digital art as an arena of faith.

Digital sacred practices may be incorporated within mosques, madrasas, and Islamic educational institutions through ethically curated virtual exhibitions, AR-enhanced Qur'anic learning, and digital calligraphy platforms that broaden access while preserving reverence. At the same time, certain communities may intentionally resist full digital adoption where concerns arise regarding the dilution of sacred aura, the risk of desacralisation, or the commodification of Qur'anic imagery. Such cautious selectivity demonstrates that digital mediation of sacredness is not received uniformly, but negotiated through theological, ethical, and communal considerations that shape how religious institutions discern the appropriate boundaries of technological use.

These dynamics carry significant practical theological implications for contemporary faith communities as they navigate the tension between embodied devotion and technologically mediated sacred experience. Religious institutions are increasingly required to discern how digital media may support spiritual formation without undermining communal worship, ritual presence, or the contemplative atmosphere traditionally linked to sacred spaces. As a result, faith communities must develop theological guidelines that ensure digital representation functions as an extension of syi'ar rather than a replacement for lived religious practice, enabling technology to serve as a supportive medium rather than a competing authority.

The novelty of this research lies in mapping visual sacredness in the digital context as a form of public theology. Unlike aesthetic studies that focus solely on formal aspects, this research shows that Qur'anic iconography, the identity politics of Muslim artists, and the digitalization of exhibitions shape a new theological landscape. This article offers the perspective that contemporary Islamic art is a global ritualisation arena where sacredness is negotiated, faith is preserved, and traditions are re-created. From this standpoint, the research not only addresses debates about visual representation in Islam but also expands the horizon of theology into the digital realm, which has been scarcely explored.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that the theology of visual sacredness in Islam is never static, but continuously negotiated within the dynamics of iconography, identity, and digitalization. The iconography of calligraphy, geometry, and light showcases the dimensions of *tanzīh*, *taqdīs*, and *syi'ar*, which form the foundation of visual sacredness, both in classical and contemporary exhibitions. The identity of Muslim artists and the reception of global audiences demonstrate that Islamic art functions as an arena for political representation, where faith and cosmopolitanism meet. Digitalization adds a new layer by expanding access, while also challenging the concept of sacred aura in the era of virtual exhibitions. Overall, the findings

show that contemporary Islamic art is not merely an aesthetic expression but a living space for public theology within the contexts of modernity and globalization.

Practical recommendations from this research suggest that curators, artists, and cultural institutions should position Islamic iconography not merely as visual artifacts, but as integral parts of a faith narrative that must preserve its sanctity. Digitalization must be approached critically: while it can expand access, it also requires a curatorial framework that maintains the sacred dimension to prevent it from being reduced to mere visual entertainment.

The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on literature review without direct involvement in curation practices and audience reception. Future research should broaden its scope by conducting exhibition ethnographies, interviews with artists and curators, as well as reception studies with both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. A multidisciplinary approach combining theology, art studies, and digital studies will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic visual sacredness transforms in the global era.

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