

The Symbolic Meaning of Seloka Batik Motifs in the Development of Contemporary Batik Design

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the symbolic meaning of the Seloka Cilacap Batik motif and analyze its potential as a source for developing contemporary batik designs. The focus of the research is directed at the Parang Nusakambangan motif and the Biota Laut Pesisir motif as a representation of the cultural identity of the Cilacap coastal community. The study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive method through observation, in-depth interviews, visual documentation, and literature studies. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model supported by triangulation of sources and techniques to maintain data validity. The results show that the Parang Nusakambangan motif contains symbols of steadfastness, continuity, and fighting spirit inspired by the natural character of Nusakambangan Island, while the Biota Laut Pesisir motif represents the adaptive relationship between humans and the marine ecosystem. Visual forms in the form of diagonal patterns, coral textures, stylization of marine biota, and exploration of coastal colors serve as symbolic markers of local identity. This shows that the symbolic meaning of Seloka Batik can be creatively reinterpreted in the development of innovative contemporary batik designs rooted in local wisdom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Batik is one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages with complex aesthetic, philosophical, and social values. Not only does it function as a textile product, but it also serves as a visual communication medium that represents cultural identity, spiritual values, and human relationships with their social and natural environments (Fitriani & Harjito 2023; Suliyati & Yuliati, 2019). Each batik motif contains symbols and meanings that reflect the outlook of the community that created it, allowing batik to be understood as a cultural artifact imbued with local knowledge and wisdom.

However, in the context of globalization and the development of the modern creative industry, the symbolic dimension of traditional batik tends to experience a reduction in meaning. The increasingly commercial orientation of the batik industry has driven a shift from philosophical to economic values, resulting in many batik motifs being produced without a deep understanding of their symbolic meaning (Handayani, 2021). This situation has had a significant impact on the younger generation, who are more familiar with batik as a fashion product and formal wear rather than as a symbol of cultural identity (Putri et al., 2022). Data from the National Crafts Council (Dekranas, 2024) shows that the majority of

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young consumers view batik primarily as formal wear, rather than as a representation of cultural values. This phenomenon underscores the need for a new approach that can bridge tradition and innovation by exploring the symbolic meaning of batik as a source of inspiration for contemporary design.

As a locally developed cultural product, batik in various regions of Indonesia displays distinct visual characteristics and philosophies, depending on their social and geographical conditions. In the Cilacap region of Central Java, a coastal batik tradition has developed with motifs reflecting the community's closeness to the natural environment, such as Wijaya Kusuma, Mangrove, and Teluk Penyu (Vahrina, 2021). One of this region's distinctive batik innovations is Seloka Batik, developed by a group of artisans in Adipala District. The term "seloka" in Javanese tradition refers to poetic expressions containing moral messages and life philosophies, so Seloka Batik can be understood as a visual narrative representing the wisdom and cultural values of the Cilacap community (Margono & Supriyanto, 2024).

So far, the development of Batik Seloka has been more directed at aspects of the creative economy, such as increasing production skills, material innovation and marketing strategies (Widyaningrum et al., 2023). However, in-depth studies regarding the symbolic meaning of the Batik Seloka motif and its potential as a source of inspiration for contemporary design are still relatively limited. In fact, the symbolic approach in design has an important role in presenting work that is not only aesthetically oriented, but also culturally and contextually meaningful (Wulandari et al., 2022). This gap shows the urgency of research that focuses on exploring the symbolism of Seloka Batik in the development of modern batik designs.

In the development of contemporary batik, the tendency to adopt global visuals often ignores the value of local traditions as a conceptual foundation for design. Rahardjo and Kusumastuti (2023) emphasized that the lack of local cultural support in modern batik design can lead to the loss of regional identity and distinctiveness. Conversely, global trends in the creative industry demonstrate a growing appreciation for products based on local wisdom that possess authentic value and strong cultural narratives (Rahmawati, 2025). Therefore, exploring the symbolic meaning of Seloka Batik has strategic potential in strengthening local cultural identity while increasing the competitiveness of contemporary batik designs in the global market.

From an academic perspective, previous batik research has generally focused on visual, historical, or technical aspects of production, while symbolic studies directly integrated into the design development process have been limited (Febriani et al., 2024). In addition to contributing to the enrichment of scientific discourse in the fields of art and design, this approach also has the potential to support the empowerment of a community-based creative economy and the adaptive and sustainable preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Unja, 2024).

Based on this background, this study aims to explore the symbolic meanings contained in the Seloka Batik motif and analyze the application of these symbolic values as a source of inspiration in the development of contemporary batik designs. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of batik symbolism as well as practical contributions to the development of designs rooted in local wisdom, thereby supporting cultural preservation and strengthening the identity of Cilacap regional batik in the context of modern art and design.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Batik

Batik comes from the Javanese language, namely "amba" meaning to write and "nitik" meaning dot. What is meant is writing with wax. Batik on cloth using a canting with a small tip gives the impression of "a person writing dots". The term batik is often associated with a process method starting from drawing the motif to the process of pelodan or the process of removing wax from the batik cloth. According to Hakim (2018), batik art is the art of drawing on cloth for clothing that

became a culture of the Indonesian (Javanese) royal family in ancient times. The origins of the birth of batik in Indonesia are related to the development of the Majapahit, Solo and Yogyakarta kingdoms.

The presence of several motifs indicates the region of the wearer and can be worn by royal families such as the Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces. In the past, Javanese women utilized batik as a livelihood. Originally, batik was a traditional tradition passed down through generations. Batik experienced development in the 10th century when Java imported mori cloth (the base fabric for batik) from India. Batik developed more widely on the island of Java due to its relatively high population density. Batik creation was not limited to the island of Java, but also through international trade with foreign cultures such as India, China, and the Middle East (Trixie, 2020).

The popularity of batik began to increase in the late 18th or early 19th century. This was marked by the emergence of stamped batik, marking the beginning of the industrial era. Furthermore, this era introduced a new technique, batik printing. This batik influenced the industry due to its faster process and significantly lower price compared to hand-drawn batik. The advent of industrialization also marked the rise and fall of batik, particularly on the island of Java (Kustiyah, 2017).

2.2 *Seloka* Batik Motif

One important aspect of batik products is the decorative design. Batik motifs can generally be categorized into organic motifs (inspired by flora/fauna, clouds, waves) and geometric/ornamental motifs (*parang*, *kawung*, *gringsing*, etc.), each of which carries a distinct symbolic vocabulary. For example, floral motifs are often associated with fertility/blessings, while geometric motifs are often related to cosmology or social structure. Regional motifs are batik motifs that possess unique and characteristic visual elements that characterize a particular region (Soeprapto, et al., 2021). Regional motifs are created by exploring the unique and prominent natural and cultural potential of the region, which is already widely known by the community (Salma, 2019). Motif designs from various regions demonstrate how these forms are stylized according to local traditions, creating distinctive morphological variations.

Batik Seloka is a form of community-based contemporary batik creation that emerged in Adipala Village, Adipala District, Cilacap Regency. This artisan group was founded around 2015 and developed through empowerment and mentoring programs involving local actors and the CSR program of the Adipala 2 Central Java Power Plant (PLTU/Central Java). This group positions batik not merely as a commercial product, but also as a medium for preserving local cultural identity and social empowerment (for example, for the elderly and people with disabilities).

Seloka Batik has a distinctive characteristic, namely the motifs used are coastal because Cilacap is identical to the coast according to its geographical location. In addition, it is known for several typical motifs that it produces, namely the *sekar kantil* motif, *parang bata*, and *parang nusakambangan* (Margono & Supriyanto, 2024). On the other hand, the *Seloka* Batik motif combines coastal elements (marine themes), local flora and fauna (for example *Wijayakusuma*), as well as new creative motifs that depict the identity of Cilacap such as the "*Parang Nusakambangan*" motif, "*Jagadan Pesisir*", "*Wijayakusuma Pesisir*", "*Parang Petir*", and other thematic motifs (including PLTU/industrialization themed motifs and monument motifs). These motifs tend to emphasize bright basic colors (blue, yellow, red) which are different from most Javanese batik which are often soft.

2.3 Symbolic Meaning

Symbolic meaning is an important concept in visual studies, art, and design, because every visual element not only functions aesthetically but also conveys cultural messages, social values, and represents identity. A semiotic approach serves as the primary framework for uncovering how signs, symbols, and visual representations shape meaning. Symbols work through the interaction between visual forms and the surrounding cultural context, so that the interpretation of meaning is strongly influenced by the social experiences of the community (Vallverdu-Gordi & Marine-Roig, 2023). Furthermore, symbols in traditional motifs have a dual function: as aesthetic ornaments and as a medium for preserving

cultural values. Semiotic studies of batik motifs in various regions of Indonesia reveal that visual meaning lies not only at the level of form, but also in historical narratives, life philosophies, and local wisdom passed down across generations (Dewi et al., 2020). Thus, interpreting symbolic meaning in visual works requires an understanding of the socio-cultural context of their creation.

In contemporary design development, symbolic meaning is also an important factor in determining a product's cultural relevance. According to Suzianti et al. (2023), the younger generation is more interested in using traditional products (including batik) if the design combines cultural symbols with modern aesthetics that suit their lifestyle. This shows that symbolic meaning does not have to be presented in its existing form, but can be creatively reinterpreted in the development of contemporary design. Thus, symbolic meaning plays a role in the development of contemporary design, including batik products, which must remain rooted in cultural values but present visuals that are in line with current developments.

2.4 Contemporary Batik Design

Contemporary batik design has evolved in response to changes in aesthetics, market needs, and the lifestyles of modern society. Innovations in batik design demonstrate a significant shift from traditional, fixed patterns to more free, expressive, and experimental visual explorations. This transformation is primarily influenced by the demands of the creative industry, the development of digital technology, and the younger generation's preference for more dynamic visuals (Suzianti et al., 2023). Contemporary batik not only modifies the visual form but also maintains the continuity of the symbolic meanings inherited from the original motifs.

Furthermore, according to Suzianti et al. (2023), millennials and Gen Z prefer batik designs that combine modern aesthetics, simplicity of form, and flexibility of use. This suggests that the success of contemporary batik design depends not only on visual innovation but also on the design's ability to adapt to modern consumer lifestyles. Therefore, developing contemporary batik design requires a combination of visual creativity and an understanding of traditional meanings and market needs. Therefore, contemporary batik cannot be separated from the analysis of culture, aesthetics, and the ever-evolving creative industry.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive method, because the main objective of this study is to explore the symbolic meaning contained in the Seloka Batik motif and analyze it as a source for the development of contemporary batik designs. This research was conducted at Seloka batik located in Adipala District, Cilacap Regency. The location was chosen because it is one of the centers of batik artisan activity who are actively developing typical Cilacap batik motifs with local values. The research subjects include Seloka batik artisans, local batik designers, art and culture observers, and people who understand the development of Cilacap batik motifs. The selection of subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on their expertise, experience, and involvement in the process of creating and developing batik motifs.

The data collection technique was carried out through four main stages, namely field observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature study. Observations were conducted to observe the visual elements of the motifs, the creative process of the craftsmen, and the motif exploration techniques used in the production of Seloka batik. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with craftsmen, designers, and cultural figures to explore the meaning of symbols, the philosophical background of the motifs, and views on the possibility of developing them towards contemporary design. Documentation included the collection of photographs, archives, and batik works relevant to the research theme. In addition, literature study was conducted to strengthen the analysis through the study of design theory, visual semiotics, and previous research on contemporary batik.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected data related to symbolic meaning and potential design development. The data were then presented in narrative form, motif classification tables, and motif visualizations to facilitate the process of symbol interpretation. The conclusion drawing stage was carried out iteratively by interpreting symbolic meaning and formulating a concept for developing contemporary designs rooted in the Seloka Batik motif. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation techniques, namely checking the suitability of data from various sources and collection methods. Researchers also implemented member checking by requesting confirmation of interpretation results from informants to ensure the validity of the findings.

4. FINDINGS

Seloka Batik is a form of community-based contemporary batik development that has developed in Adipala District, Cilacap Regency since around 2015. Historically, the presence of Seloka Batik cannot be separated from the Javanese coastal batik tradition that developed along with the social, economic, and geographical changes of coastal communities. Cilacap as a southern coastal area of Java has a different natural character compared to the northern coast, especially marked by the presence of the Indian Ocean and Nusakambangan Island which presents a harsh, dynamic natural landscape, and full of symbolic meaning. The term *seloka* in Javanese tradition refers to expressions or proverbs containing moral messages and life philosophies. This name emphasizes that Seloka Batik functions not only as a textile product, but also as a visual narrative medium that conveys the values, life experiences, and local wisdom of the Cilacap community. In this case, *Seloka Batik* motifs are developed through a process of local history, human relations with coastal nature, and the need to adapt to the development of contemporary batik design. The two main motifs are the Parang Nusakambangan Motif and the Coastal Marine Biota Motif, which represent two complementary symbolic approaches between classical motifs and exploration of coastal natural representations.

4.1 The Symbolic Meaning of the Parang Nusakambangan Motif.

The Parang Nusakambangan motif is a development of the classic parang motif, historically known as one of the oldest motifs in the Javanese batik tradition. The classic parang motif developed during the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, particularly in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, and is associated with the values of leadership, steadfastness, and continuity of life. This motif was created during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo (17th century). The word parang comes from the word *pereng*, meaning slope or cliff, referring to the regularly repeated elongated diagonal shape. The basic structure of the repeated diagonal lines reflects the philosophy of relentless struggle and continuity of strength. In Batik Seloka, the parang motif is contextually reinterpreted into Parang Nusakambangan, which began to be developed around 2017–2018 by Batik Seloka artisans Novi and Wahyu as an effort to present a distinctive visual identity of Cilacap. This development stems from direct observation of the natural features of Nusakambangan Island, such as karst cliffs, coral rocks, and the southern coast. Thus, the Parang Nusakambangan motif not only presents the visual structure of the classic parang, but also changes its meaning according to local geography and culture. Visually, the Parang Nusakambangan motif retains the typical repeating diagonal pattern of the parang, but displays a more defined and textured form. The *isen-isèn* used resembles the texture of coral and ocean waves, thus creating a strong, sturdy, and dynamic impression. The use of color varies, from black and white to coastal color combinations such as green, yellow, and brown *sogan*, reflecting the natural character of Nusakambangan.

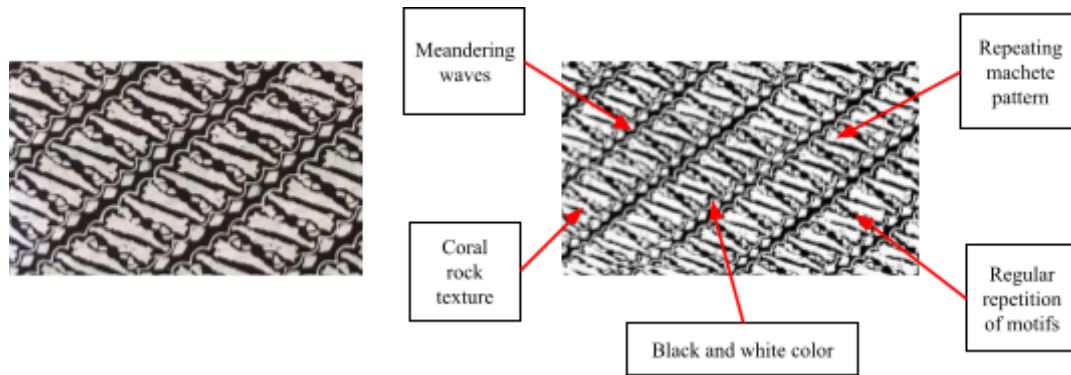


Fig 1. (Left and Right) Form of the Nusakambangan Parang Motif

Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025

Table 1. Symbolic Meaning of the Parang Nusakambangan Motif

No	Image	Indicator	Symbolic Meaning
1.		Diagonal repeating parang pattern	Symbolizes the continuity of life, steadfastness and consistency of coastal communities in facing the dynamics of the southern seas.
	Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025		
2.		Meander Waveform	Representing the power, energy and dynamics of the Indian Ocean waves which are part of the lives of the Nusakambangan people.
	Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025		
3.		Texture resembles coral	Depicts the resilience, strength and fighting spirit of coastal communities who live side by side with harsh nature.
	Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025		
4.		Regular repetition of motifs	Symbolizes order, balance and harmony of life in harmony with the natural cycle of the coast.
	Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025		

5.		Black and white color	Symbolizes firmness, vigilance, and the duality of life between the power and balance of nature.
Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025			

4.2 Symbolic Meaning of Coastal Marine Biota Motifs.

Unlike the Parang Nusakambangan motif, which is based on a reinterpretation of classical motifs, the Biota Laut Pesisir motif was developed through direct exploration of the natural coastal environment of Cilacap. Batik Seloka began developing this motif around 2019–2020 in response to a desire to expand the visual diversity of batik while strengthening local narratives based on coastal ecology. The Biota Laut Pesisir motif features stylizations of various marine organisms such as fish, seahorses, jellyfish, crabs, coral reefs, and ocean currents. The selection of these biota is not merely decorative, but rather represents the lived experiences of coastal communities who depend on the sea for their livelihoods. Historically, representations of marine biota in coastal batik have been known since the 19th century, particularly in the northern coastal areas of Java such as Lasem, Pekalongan, and Cirebon, which feature fish, shrimp, and marine elements as symbols of prosperity and cultural openness. However, in Batik Seloka, this motif presents a more dynamic and expressive southern coastal character. The colors used in this motif tend to be bright and contrasting, such as blue, green, yellow, and red, representing the visual richness of marine ecosystems and the open-minded character of coastal batik, which embraces color exploration. The combination of biota elements and ocean current patterns creates a fluid and rhythmic visual composition in harmony with the nature of the sea.

The creation of the Coastal Marine Biota motif is carried out through an exploratory approach by directly observing the forms and characteristics of marine organisms, then transforming them into decorative batik stylizations. Batik Seloka artisans adapt traditional batik techniques with the freedom to explore shapes and colors, resulting in motifs that are not bound by classical canons, but still have local cultural roots. This demonstrates that Batik Seloka not only reproduces traditional motifs, but also carries out symbolic reinterpretations that are contextual to the Cilacap coastal environment.

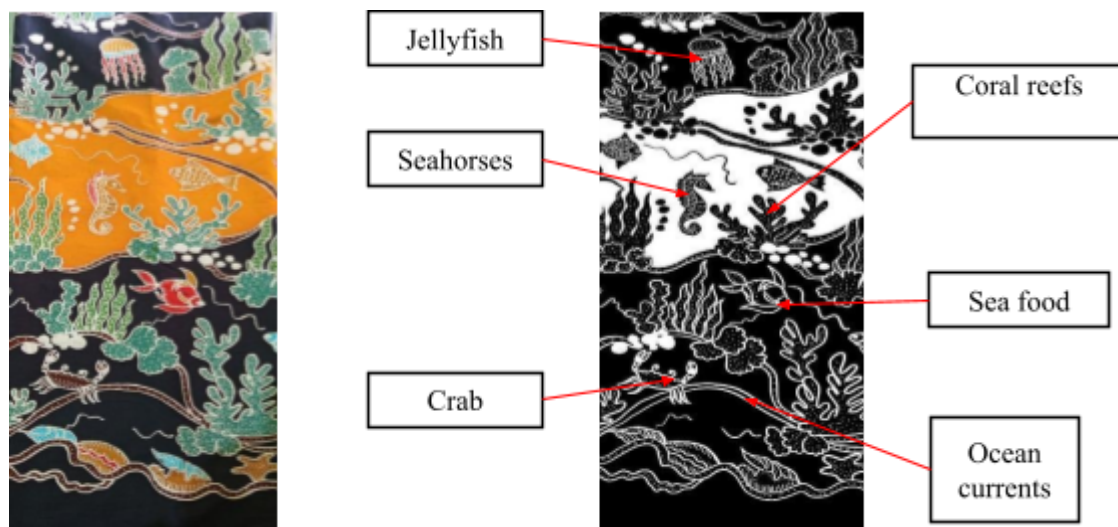


Fig 2. (Left and Right) Forms of Coastal Marine Biota Motifs

Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025

Table 4. Symbolic Meaning of Coastal Marine Biota Motifs

No	Picture	Indicator	Symbolic Meaning
1.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Sea food	Symbolizes life, abundance of sustenance, and the sustainability of marine resources which are the mainstay of life for the coastal communities of Cilacap.
2.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Seahorses	Representing patience, resilience and balance in life, reflecting the character of coastal communities who are able to survive in dynamic natural conditions.
3.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Jellyfish	Symbolizes sensitivity, adaptation, and vigilance towards uncertain changes in the marine environment.
4.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Crab	Symbolizes resilience, survival strategies, and adaptability in coastal tidal areas.
5.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Coral reefs/Sea plants	Represents the support of life, ecosystem balance, and the interdependent relationship between living creatures in the sea.
6.	 Source: Elisa Jatri Wardana, 2025	Ocean currents.	Symbolizes the dynamics, rhythm of nature, and regularity of the ocean cycle that influences the social and economic activities of coastal communities.

4.3 Symbolic Meaning and Its Relevance to Contemporary Batik Design.

The results of the study indicate that the Parang Nusakambangan motif and the Coastal Marine Biota motif form a unified symbolic narrative about the identity of the Cilacap community. Parang Nusakambangan represents the values of steadfastness and continuity of tradition, while the Coastal Marine Biota emphasizes the adaptive relationship between humans and the natural environment. Both demonstrate that Seloka Batik does not merely process visual forms, but also builds symbolic meanings rooted in local historical and ecological experiences. In the context of contemporary batik design, these two motifs have great potential to be developed through the exploration of repetitive patterns, simplification of forms, and color innovations without losing their symbolic meaning. The visual flexibility and depth of meaning make Seloka Batik relevant for application in modern fashion products, interiors, and other creative products. Thus, the exploration of symbolic meaning in Seloka Batik proves that innovation in contemporary batik design can be carried out without abandoning local cultural roots. In fact, strengthening symbolic meaning is an important strategy in creating authentic, identifiable, and competitive designs in the global creative industry.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Batik Seloka Cilacap contains strong symbolic meaning as a representation of the cultural identity of coastal communities. The Parang Nusakambangan motif reflects the values of steadfastness, continuity, and fighting spirit inspired by the natural character of Nusakambangan Island, while the Biota Laut Pesisir motif represents the adaptive relationship between humans and the marine ecosystem as a source of life and balance. Visual forms in the form of diagonal patterns, coral textures, stylization of marine biota, and exploration of coastal colors function not only as aesthetic ornaments, but also as symbols of local philosophical and ecological values. This shows that the symbolic meaning of Batik Seloka can be creatively reinterpreted in the development of contemporary batik designs without losing its traditional roots. Thus, the exploration of Batik Seloka symbolism plays an important role in creating innovative batik designs, with local identity, and relevant to the needs of the modern creative industry.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Elisa Jatri Wardana contributed to the conceptualisation of the study, research design, fieldwork, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of findings, preparation of the original draft, and manuscript revision. Slamet Supriyadi contributed to supervision, methodology review, validation of data, critical editing, language refinement, and final approval of the manuscript for submission. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

ETHICS STATEMENTS

This study was conducted in accordance with academic research ethics and under an official research permission letter issued by the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Sebelas Maret, Ref. No. 7265/UN27/PK.03.08/2026. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection from the main informant, Dwi Novie Kartika Prabandari of Batik Seloka. Participation was voluntary, and the informant agreed to provide information, interviews, and visual documentation for academic purposes. The researchers declare that there were no personal, financial, or social conflicts of interest related to this study. All collected data were used solely for scholarly purposes, and publication approval was granted by the informant with respect to confidentiality, dignity, and research integrity.

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