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Users’ Perception on Application of Ornamentation Motif Between Excessive and Minimal Decorated Praying Hall of Community Mosque

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Abstract

Most of the prominent elements of decorating the interior of the mosque is the application ornamentation motif on the surface. Some of the mosques are highly decorated and some are minimally decorated. All those decorations are created by people to people. However, very few paid attention to what people perceive about it. The decoration in the interior of the mosque will affect the people inside it especially their feeling. Therefore, this paper will discover the users' perception towards the application of ornamentation motif in the interior of the mosque. Data was collected by using survey and questionnaire as main method. The survey has been done at two different mosques which is different in term of the intensity of application of ornamentation motif in the interior space.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays mosques are decorated with decorations and carvings became a common and widespread phenomenon. (Sheikh Ali, M. M. ,2003). The most intention of the application of motif in praying hall is

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to create the feeling of Tawhid and feeling of remembering Allah. (Omer, S, 2002, Norzalifa, Z.A, 2003, Othman. R, 2011, Omer, S, 2005). However how far this intention reaches to the users of each decorated mosque. Omer (2005) stated that moderate decoration is lawful, yet the Mihrab (imam's praying niche) should be left undecorated lest the worshippers might be disturbed by its ornamentation motif, as the mihrab area is the central point of congregational prayers. Decorations found in most of the walls of the building mosques in Malaysia are also copied from mosques built there in the golden age of Islam. (Utaberta, Sojak, Surat, & Tahir, 2012). Most of the time, these ornaments will reflect local traditions with a mixture of foreign influences, subject to the geographical area of the particular Islamic world. (R. Othman, Z.J.Zainal-Abidin,2011).

Meaning of ornament in Islamic art as explained by Holod (1988) are a form of surface decoration. It represented by vegetal, figural, or calligraphic (calligraphy). While , Mittrache .A (2012) stated that ornament, defined as an element added to a work of art in order to enhance its aesthetic attributes and the depth and legibility of its symbolic connotations, is an anthropological constant, used by practically all cultures as an intrinsic part of artistic works. All forms of ornament occur in Islamic Art, with the calligraphic form clearly predominate and figural forms being of less importance. (Holod, 1988). This was happened due to prohibition the flgural form is Islamic decoration. Therefore in Islamic architecture most of motif derived only from vegetal or floral, geometric shape and Calligraphy taken from a Quran verse or hadith from the prophet. While motif as stated by Forsgren (2002) is a theme or visual image repeatedly employed in a work.

Countries in the Malaysia would use traditional motifs taken from local vegetal such as rice plant and lotus. But nowadays there are some adaptation of Middle Eastern motifs and geometrical patterns in the contemporary mosques of the Malaysia. (R. Othman, Z.J.Zainal-Abidin,2011). Generally motif that has been applied on ornamented surface of the praying hall in Malaysia are derived from floral, geometric shape as well the Calligraphy taken from a Quran verse or hadith of prophet. Forsgren (2002) addressed that the most ornate decoration in a mosque is generally found around the prayer niche, or also known as mihrab, which literally translates to a "place of struggle" where the individual fights to overcome attachments to earthly things through prayer. The mihrab is situated on the Qibla, or wall facing Mecca, as an indication of the direction Muslims should face during prayer. Since this is a most prominent wall in praying hall, the intention to decorate should be done properly lest not to disturb the user's activity inside. It should help in creating the serenity and tranquility feeling before doing the prayers. Therefore the appearance of the front wall contained the mihrab in the praying hall of the mosque is very important to study. The user's perception was examined towards this application of motif in both mosques to see whether those motifs applied to give impact to them. The study also examined their preferred mosque between excessive and minimally decorated.

2. Research Methodology

This study was carried out by employed some method of collecting and analyzed data. Mix methods were used in order to answer the research questions of this study. Following is the research methodology in collecting and analyzed data:

Data Collecting Method:

- Site Observation

Site observation was done at both selected mosques in order to identify the characteristic applied motif between highly and less decorated praying hall. Those typology, color and quantity of the motif was recorded and documented properly.

- Survey

A survey was done at both sites by using a questionnaire as the main instrument in order to get the user's perception towards the application of motif in praying hall. 120 respondents were involved in each mosque to answer the questionnaire. Age of respondents was above 18 years old, regardless their gender. A survey was done at two selected mosques as a case study site. One is highly decorated represented by the As - Falah mosque while another one is less decorated represented by As-Salam mosque. Those following criteria were taken into account in selecting a case study site:

- Modern architecture mosque
- Capacity 6000 to 7000 people at one time.
- Community mosque located in urban area community.
- Contrast characteristic in the amount of motif applied. One is highly decorated and one is less decorated praying space.

Following figure shows the selected mosque based on their contrast characteristic in term of quantity and color of the motif on ornamented praying hall:

2.1. Population and Sample

The respondent of this study was Muslim people and also as user of particular mosque. The respondent as well the sample of this study was Muslim people who are visiting the selected mosque. They were should be 18 years old and above regardless of their gender, background even their education. The questionnaire only was distributed to Malaysian Muslim people in order to be fair in examining their perception. Respondents of this survey were 120 people per mosque.

2.2. Sampling Procedure

This study will use a Non-Random Sampling method which is convenience sampling. This research will use the *convenience non-random sampling* of sampling method where the researcher will go to the user who are going into or come out of the mosque and ever visited both selected mosques.

2.3. Instrument

The main instruments of the survey were paper questionnaire. The questionnaire consists close-ended questions and 1 open-ended question at last paper. It was designed by using open-ended questionnaire in order to get some opinion from users

2.3.1. Face to Face Interview

In order to get flawless data to answer research questions, qualitative method also been incorporated in this study. Collecting data of qualitative approach has been done through the face to face interview with some people related to the mosque. All together about 4 people were involved. They are nazir of As-Salam mosque, secretary of Al-Falah mosque, ex-leader of mosque organization (JAIS) as well the academician.

2.4. Research Process

This study takes several processes to answer fulfill the aim of research. The review of literature was done at an earlier stage in order to get the information about the topic. The keywords that have been used were perception, visual perception, ornamentation, motif, and carving and mosque decorations. The

following stage was observed at both selected case study sites in order to know their characteristic of motif applied in a praying hall in term of position, quantity and color. All ornamented surfaces being observed and pictures were taken and recorded. The next phase of the study was the survey of the users of both selected mosques by using paper questionnaire. A questionnaire was distributed to the respondents represented by users of the mosque. Data from the survey was analyzed by using SPSS 20 software. The third phase was a face to face interview with personnel related to the mosque. They are from mosque organization members as well educational. Results from both quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed by using the triangulation method in order to fulfill the aim of research.

2.4.1. The results of the research and discussion

This study involved two selected mosques where one is highly decorated praying hall and another one is less decorated. The characteristic of highly decorated was identified based on the color and quantity of motif applied of ornamented surface. The highly decorated praying hall uses bright and strong color on its ornamented surface while less decorated mosque uses soft and light color. It can be seen clearly as in the table below. In terms of intensity of quantity of ornamentation motif also can be seen clearly through the picture as in table. Highly decorated mosque using high intensity of motif in its praying hall while less decorated mosque using a limited quantity of motif. Looking on highly decorated space the ornamentation motif is applied entirely on every surface compared to only on certain surfaces in less decorated space.

Results of research on the user's perception are based on typology, quantity, and color of the motif on ornamented wall in praying hall. Typology of the motif was identified as one of the variables in this study in order to examine users' awareness of its existence. The stated variables also required in determining whether the typology of ornamentation motif can help them in remembering Allah as per intention in Islamic art. While the quantity and color were taken into account due to investigate the user's preferred space between excessive and less decorated praying hall. User's perceptions on ornamented surface praying hall are as follows:

2.5. User's Perceptions were Examined based on The Following Criteria:

2.5.1. Typology of motif

Basically, both highly and less decorated space of praying hall is using similar motif. They are Calligraphy taken from Quran Verse, geometric pattern and floral motif. Some of motifs are combine each other to form a complex motif. One with the intention of that typology of motif in Islamic art is to help the users of the mosque in remembering Allah. However, this study found that not all typology motifs applied to help them in remembering the Creator. As can be seen on the Fig. 1.(a), 1.(b) and 1. (c), the most types of motif that can really create those Tawhid feelings is Calligraphy motif followed by geometric pattern. When come to the floral pattern users are really not sure that floral type of motif helping them in remembering Allah. This is due to prohibition of figural form in Islamic decoration. However, floral motif can create the pleasure of beauty of the space.

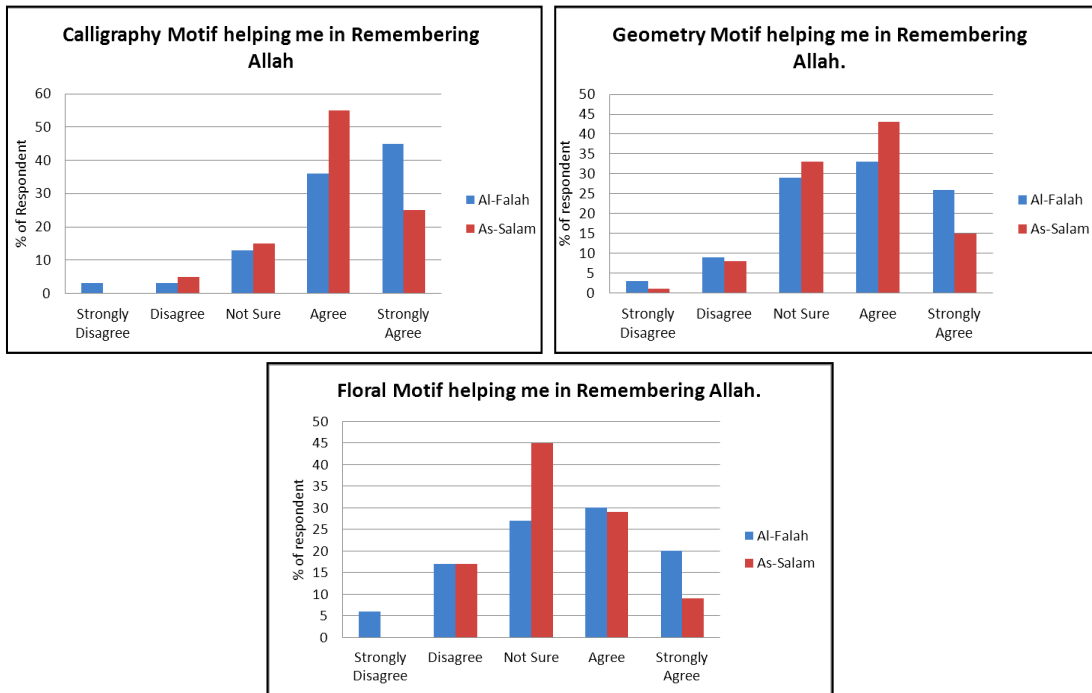


Fig. 1. (a). User’s responses on Calligraphy in helping Remembering Allah; (b). User’s responses on Calligraphy in helping Remembering Allah; (c). User’s responses on Calligraphy in helping Remembering Allah

2.5.2. Color of motif and background

Highly decorated praying hall are really contrast to less decorated mosque in term of color. Bright and strong color such as maroon, pink and green has been used on motif in the highly decorated mosque. Site observation found that seven colors were combined and applied on the motif of the heavily decorated mosque. They are green, gold, red, maroon, pink, black and white color. However, the study found that user’s who are frequently using the mosque are used to it. They are happy and pleasure with the condition of ornamented surface. On the other hand, the less decorated mosque is minimal using of color on motif. Colors that have been used in less decorated mosque are lighter and soft such as white and beige colors. The combination of color also not more than three colors on one motif. The survey found that users even from both both mosques are preferred light and soft color for praying hall. Those color helping them feel the serenity and tranquility environment. The feeling of calmness very important to the user’s before they perform their prayers and other *ibadah*. Fig. 2.(a) and 2.(b) shows the preferred mosque in creating serenity feeling.

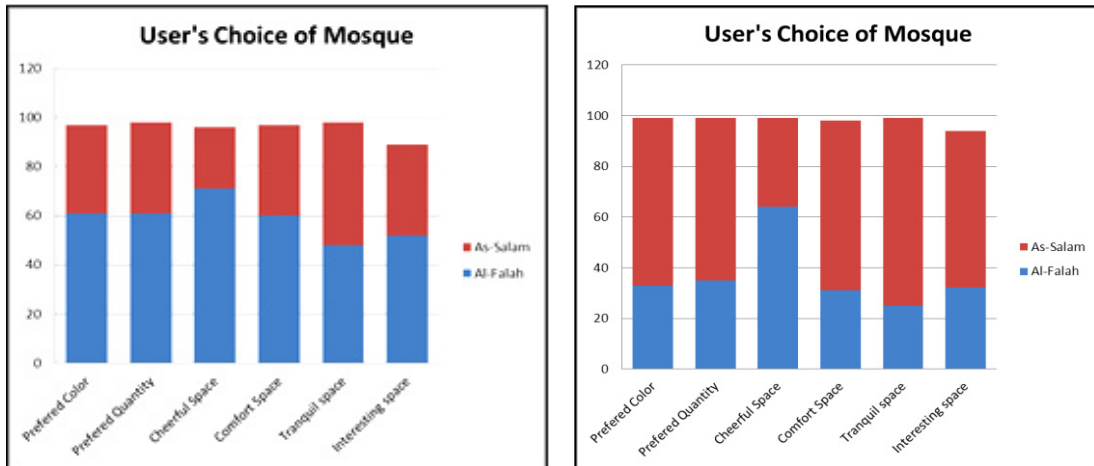


Fig. 2. (a). Al-Falah Respondent; (b). As-Salam Respondent

The bar chart above shows that users from both mosque majorities preferred the light and minimal color praying hall are much better at creating the serenity and tranquility feeling. Even though the users are familiar with Al-Falah mosque, they are still preferred As-Salam mosque better space compared to As-Falah mosque in term of color that can create the calmness feeling. However, when comes to the cheerful space both respondent are agreed that Al-Falah mosque color can create the cheerful space.

2.5.3. *Quantity of motif*

Quantity motif in both mosques can be seen clearly, is a big different. The highly decorated mosque has high intensity of motif in its praying hall, while less decorated mosque has a motif at certain surface only. Both mosques applied motif quite similar quantity in Mihrab area. A survey was done to examine whether quantity of ornamentation motif applied in different way give different effect to users. Results show that they are pleased with the quantity of ornamentation motif applied whether it is much or less. The best way to apply the motif in big quantity reduces the color. Therefore, it will not too prominently in the eyes of people who looking into it.

3. Conclusion

The ornamentation in the praying hall of the mosque is a significant feature in the interior of the mosque. It has been done over the period to enhance the magnificent of Islam. One of the most superior intention of application ornamentation in the mosque is to create the feeling of remembering Allah. This intention is good in order to help the users' mosque preparing themselves before performing the prayers. However, not all the motif can create the feeling of remembering Allah. The result of the study found the floral motif are less helping them in remembering Allah. Therefore, this motif should be reduced in term of quantity. The mosque management should apply more Calligraphy motif in the praying hall, followed by geometric pattern rather than floral motif. While in term of color, this study found that the color of motif and ornamented surface play an important role in creating the serenity and tranquility feeling. This feeling is important, especially in praying hall due to its function as a place for worshipping. The user's preferred light and soft color in the praying hall rather than bright and strong color in order to create calmness space. However the quantity of the motif on ornamented surface is not giving different impact as long as the color not too bright. According to Omer (2009) the extravagant decoration shall not be done

in order to avoid the wasteful. It is prohibited in Islam, but should be done in a moderate way. He also wrote some guidelines that regulate mosque decoration. Among of them is decoration must not interfere with people's concentration in prayers and in other worship activities. Besides, decoration must not be extravagant so that wastefulness is committed so that the declaration will not surpass in importance the primary functions of the mosques. Calligraphy carries meaningful roles as tell tale pieces of art that need to be read, understood and remembered, because there are hidden stories and histories in between the lines of decorative inscriptions. Therefore, copying the inscriptions and paste it on any mosque wall/walls is not a wise action because the inscription might contain a certain story suitable for one particular mosque in its own history. (Norzalifa, 2003).

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