Islamic Art Element in Modern Furniture Design Based on
Three Types of Design Thinking Approaches

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Abstract – This paper discusses the three most prevalent elements of Islamic art that are embedded in modern furniture. This study is isolated from three design thinking approaches. A comparative study has been executed between three most apparent elements of Islamic art, which are arabesque, geometric and calligraphy. Those three types of design are applicable and relevant to modern furniture design nowadays. Therefore, the Islamic model was the paradigm in defining the furniture design character. The unstructured parameter within the appropriate method is a significant way of collecting the findings and usually used in the area of furniture design. The main results of this study are on how Islamic pattern is linked with the artistic design elements. The outcome of this investigation also contributes to a significant tendency in contemporary furniture design thinking solutions. Finally, this paper ends with discussions from three types of design thinking, which is the normative, reflective and hermeneutic design that collaborates with the current modern furniture design.

Keywords: Furniture Design, Hermeneutic, Islamic Art Element, Normative, Reflective

Introduction

Islamic art had been widespread in Islamic culture, not only in architecture but also in furniture design. Islamic decoration tends to avoid using figurative images in any design. Furniture design was incorporated into Islamic art with the three elements, which are arabesque, geometrical and calligraphic. Arabesque style is intertwining plants or floral motifs, and it does not have drawings of mankind. Geometric patterns represent the Islamic interest in repetition, symmetry and continuous generation of pattern. The patterns are often built on combinations of repeated squares and circles. Calligraphy is the fundamental element and the most important of Islamic art. It is significant because of its role in recording the word of God. In this paper, we intend to discuss the application of Islamic art in modern furniture design. This study aims to find out the relationship between Islamic art and furniture design, which how it does apply and inspires into modern furniture design based on three design thinking approaches such as normative, reflective, and hermeneutic.

Islamic Art and Furniture Design

All religion in this world has its unique, remarkable and vital character to engage both arts, design, culture and others. Arts have been continuously used to express the true essence of religion and the divine. Religion and art strive the artists to create or represent something in concrete visual expression. As the reason, Muslim artists have used arabesque, geometrical and calligraphy motifs in Islamic art. Dunham (2016) states that for more than a thousand years, Muslim artist has been decorating texts, buildings, and other artefacts with geometric patterns. Artists working in a religious setting could hint
at the infinitude of God by drawing potentially infinite repeating patterns. Figure 1 shows the example of Islamic art element or decorative canons which are the Arabesque, Geometric and Calligraphy.

![Arabesque, Geometric, Calligraphy](image)

**Figure 1**: Islamic Art Element.

**Arabesque**
Abas (2001) states in his journal titled ‘Islamic Geometrical Patterns for the Teaching of Mathematics of Symmetry, Special Issue of Symmetry: Culture and Science’, a second distinct pattern type perfected in Islamic art called ‘Arabesque’. Arabesque pattern also known as the biomorphic pattern is a repetitive, complex and symmetrical pattern deriving from the floral motif. It was also known as patterns and mechanisms of building use and operation derived from biological models such as floral or animal forms that are used for symbolic and metaphoric reasons (Lin & Hsu, 2004).

![Modern lamp arabesque heartbeat design](image)

**Figure 2**: Modern lamp arabesque heartbeat design.

Arabesque patterns certainly are not included a figure of humanity or animals as its element or form of design or pattern. Lines, shapes and natures the most common element used in arabesque pattern. Arabesque elements were very well-known usage in many of Islam's home. In terms of furniture design, most arabesque elements design can be most commonly found in classic furniture design. In fine arts, it is the sinuous, spiralling, undulating, or serpentine line or linear motif (Legino & Forrest, 2015). It is also related to any ornament or ornamental object, like a rug or mosaic, in which flowers, foliage, fruits, vases, animals, and figures are represented in a fancifully combined pattern. In this modern age, however, it seems to collaborate with contemporary modern furniture area. Figure 2 shows the example of contemporary furniture, which is lamp arabesque heartbeat designed by Cassoni Furniture & Accessories that combined with the element of Arabesque pattern design.

**Geometric**
Geometric patterns are commonly used in furniture and architecture design. It can be seen in
many places especially mosque, palaces and Persian miniatures in the illumination of the Holy Quran. Islamic geometric pattern has been used over and over again in architecture; furniture and product design because it is the most recognisable visual expression of Islamic art. Geometric patterns occur in rich profusion throughout Islamic cultures. They are found on the diversity of materials – tiles, bricks, wood, brass, paper, plaster, glass and on many types of objects. They occur on carpets, windows, doors, screens, railings, bowls, furniture-specially pulpits in mosques, and on other surfaces. They can be seen in abundance in Persian miniatures in the illumination of the Holy Koran and on architectural facades of mosques, palaces, madrasas (Centres of Education), and tombs (Abas, 2011).

Geometrical relates to geometry or the principles of geometry. It resembles or employees the simple rectilinear or curvilinear lines or figures used in geometry. It also refers to paintings, sculptures, or sincer ornamentation of predominantly geometric characteristics. The geometrical feature of repetition patterns is mesmerising. These geometric motifs are designed to reflect trees, star, and other nature motifs. However, the motifs designed in a very abstract way makes the design aesthetically appealing. The furniture design shown in Figure 3 is instantly recognisable as being ‘Islamic’. The fact is the Morrocan bookshelf designed by Younes Design is inspired by the geometrical patterns in Islamic art elements.

Calligraphy
Arabic calligraphy is a kind of artwork that emphasises the beauty contained in Arabic calligraphy that has modern or styled to be used as art. It is known in Arabic as the Khat derived from the word line, design, or construction. Arabic calligraphy is highly revered, and most works follow the examples set by well-established calligraphers, except for contemporary secular works. Although most foreigners can't decipher the Arabic alphabet, they can appreciate the beauty of Islamic calligraphy art. Arabic calligraphy is one of the three main features of Islamic art which is Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and the vegetal motif. In addition to calligraphy, there are two others in the Islamic art of geometry patterns and plant motifs (arabesque). Arabic calligraphy is often used for jewellery other than on paper even tiles, murals, coins as well as in today's modern furniture. Moreover, Arabic calligraphy is one of the most creative and inspiring designer's modern furniture. The attraction of the calligraphy art in this inspiring of new furniture design toward consumers to meet their tastes. Megahed (2015) states that the uses of the Arabic script as a form of furniture, instead of just for decoration, and to introduce Arabic calligraphy into contemporary furniture design. The resulting furniture must also support human activities and be sustainable. Furniture is the significant element in interior design. It uses a wide range of materials the matter from which a thing is or can be made and colours the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light (Ali, Khairuddin & Abidin, 2013). Calligraphy is fancy penmanship, especially since it is highly decorative handwriting, as with a great many flourishes. It is known as handwriting or penmanship. The art of writing is beautiful. It is also a script, usually cursive, although sometimes
angular, produced chiefly by brush, especially Arabic writing of high aesthetic value. Fine Arts of calligraphy is related to the line or a group of lines either derived from or resembling letter forms and characterised by qualities usually associated with cursive writing especially that produced with a brush or pen.

![Image of Arabic calligraphy and lamp design]

*Figure 4: The collaboration of Arabic calligraphy and lamp design.*

Figure 4 above is one of the Iyad Naja’s artwork from Lebanon. The design shows elements of Arabic calligraphy in this artwork, and it received a place in the hearts of buyers. The lamps have a unique art of calligraphy and give inspiration to other designers or buyers. Even in the digital era, modern designers and calligraphers still use Arabic calligraphy as an essential element of designs. While many contemporary calligraphers and designers use the standard script styles mentioned above, others prefer a freestyle script unrestricted by the rules of any of the known standard scripts. This freestyle relies on the beauty of Arabic glyphs and how it can be curved, twisted, and reshaped to form harmonious and eye-catching artwork. The art of Arabic calligraphy should be respected and treated with high sensitivity. Individuals who work with Arabic calligraphy, whether in furniture design or prints, should highly have or shows deep religious feeling or commitment and skilled.

**Comparative Study of Three Types of Design Thinking Approaches**

*Normative design thinking in Islamic Art Modern Furniture*

Normalizing is a standard evaluative which justifies beliefs, attitudes and actions to be taken based on aesthetic value, knowledge or even morality (Gedenryd, 1998; Rowe, 1987). This type of design thinking requires the consideration of the basic or standard of a particular product, especially on its function. The changes in normative design thinking were more on product's creative and aesthetic value as to bring differences or speciality towards product design offered by the company.
Figure 5 shows a lamp designed by Cassoni Furniture and Accessories that have been modernised with the use of normative arabesque floral pattern on a heart form of design. The normal or standard structure of this type of floor lamp design is the character of floor lamp that has a standard stand and a bulb which offer light source. Additional on the aesthetic of the heart form and arabesque pattern of the lamp head provides a different identity and speciality of the lamp's company. ‘Current design solutions require consideration of aesthetic features all the way from the form surface appearance to make the form marketable’ (see Abidin, 2012).

Reflective design thinking in Islamic Art Modern Furniture
Reflective is characterised by a thoughtful conversation with materials whose basic structure- seeing-moving- seeing- is an interaction between designing and discovery (Schön & Wiggins, 1992). Figures 6 show the patterns of Islamic geometrical and geometric Morrocan bookshelf designed by Younes Design. The bookshelf can be characterised by a reflective design. The design reflects the pattern of geometrics which is inspired by star motifs and the patterns also recognised as being “Islamic”. The reflective practitioner reflects on something by immersing in reflection, such as the subject is still positioned in a traditional distanced role about the object.
In the fields of design even though reflective thinking has been deemed as a critical element that facilitates designers’ process of solving design problems and that helps improve design ability as well as design performance. Reflection can be defined as “an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it” (p. 135). The use of geometrical form as characteristic of Islamic art can be considered as references in the design.

Hermeneutic design thinking in Islamic Art Modern Furniture
A hermeneutic model for designing is based on interpretative and intuitive processes, which are, firstly, driven by the inherent knowledge, past experiences, and prevailing assumptions of designers, and, secondly, stimulated by the designer’s interaction with the material in its context (Darke, 1979).

The use of Arabic calligraphy designed by the Iyad Naja’s in the design of lamp highlighting is a new inspiration of the Islamic art (see Figure 7). Also, it is in the eyes of the world indirectly highlighting the art of Islam in the design industry. Arabic calligraphy designers on the contemporary modern furniture give inspiration to the buyer or new designers. The improvement of a product of original products and combined with Arabic calligraphy is a fascinating idea to attract the purchaser. The element in the above figure is based on hermeneutics as interpretative and intuitive processes. The design of the lamp combined with Arabic calligraphy looks futuristic with improvements in the design.

Conclusion
Therefore, Islam has concluded that Islamic art is the creation of a form that contains an aesthetic value to the ethical values of Islam. The uses of Islamic art in the modern design industry can attract more buyers of this product due to its design very creative, unique and interesting and there are traits Islamic. Finally, Islamic art in furniture has highlighted three elements, namely Arabesque, Geometrical, and Calligraphy in designing a form. Furthermore, it shows, Normative, Reflective and Hermeneutic in design that collaborates with modern furniture, which is designed to elevate the influence of Islam on the world and is indirectly known.

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References