

TRADITIONAL SNACKS AS CULTURAL TOURISM ASSETS IN STRENGTHENING LOCAL GASTRONOMIC IDENTITY

*¹Wahyu Tri Hastiningsih

¹Hospitality Study Program, Politeknik Indonusa Surakarta, Indonesia

Author's email:

¹wahyutri@poltekindonusa.ac.id

*Corresponding author: wahyutri@poltekindonusa.ac.id

Abstract. *Traditional market snacks are part of a gastronomic heritage that not only serves as a food product, but also as a representation of the cultural identity, local knowledge, and food system of the Javanese people. This research aims to examine the role of traditional market snacks as cultural tourism assets in strengthening local gastronomic identity and its contribution to the resilience and sovereignty of local food-based food in the Solo Raya region. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an exploratory design. Data collection was carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of 24 informants consisting of market snack producers/traders, cross-generational consumers, as well as academics and tourism actors. Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña with the help of thematic analysis. The results of the study show that market snacks still have high relevance in the lives of contemporary people because of the value of nostalgia, simplicity, and authenticity of taste. All producers use local non-wheat foods such as glutinous rice, cassava, coconut, corn, and coconut sugar, which contribute to strengthening food sovereignty and reducing dependence on imported materials. Market snacks also have cultural meaning, social functions, and strong potential as an experiential-based tourism attraction through storytelling, production processes, and interactions in traditional markets. However, this study identifies the main challenges in the form of generation gaps, promotion limitations, and regeneration of business actors. This research confirms that traditional market snacks are a strategic sustainability-based cultural tourism asset to strengthen the identity of local gastronomy in Central Java.*

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism; Local Gastronomic Identity; Traditional Snacks.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities in Surakarta including, Solo, Karanganyar, Klaten and its surroundings, are known as areas with a rich traditional culinary that reflects the historical and cultural journey of the Javanese people. Traditional snacks such as pecel ndeso, cabuk rambak, gethuk, tiwul, serabi notosuman, klepon, carang gesing, and jenang are not only food products, but also symbols of identity, local knowledge, and ways of life that are passed down through generations. The presence of traditional snacks in local markets such as Pasar Gede (Solo), Pasar Karanganyar and Pasar Ir Soekarno Sukoharjo reflects the Javanese people's attachment to local foods such as rice, sticky rice, cassava, coconut, and corn that have been part of regional food security for hundreds of years.

However, modernization, food industrialization, and changes in consumer preferences have led to a decline in the consumption of traditional snacks among the younger generation. Contemporary studies show that the homogenization of global food, the dominance of imported wheat flour, and an instant lifestyle have shifted people's attention away from food based on local wisdom (Widjaja et al., 2020).

In some cities, traditional snacks began to lose their function as cultural symbols and began to be treated simply as economic products without the accompanying narrative and philosophical context. This raises concerns about the loss of traces of Javanese gastronomic identity if preservation and revitalization efforts are not carried out.

On the other hand, the trend of cultural and gastronomic tourism actually opens up new opportunities for local culinary. Travelers are starting to seek authentic experiences, including food that preserves traditional values, stories, and techniques. Traditional snacks have great potential as cultural tourism assets because of their multisensory nature: taste, manufacturing process, philosophy, and social context, all of which can be tourist attractions (Djono et al., 2023). Global research on heritage gastronomy shows that traditional foods can serve as a catalyst for regional identity and local economic development (Pedro & Fu, 2020; Sidali et al., 2015).

Some research on Central Javanese cuisine is still focused on documentary aspects, culinary mapping, or digital promotion without comprehensively exploring the relationship between traditional snacks, gastronomic identity, and food sustainability. Several studies highlight the phenomenon of food hybridity, changes in consumer behavior, or culinary recommendation technology, but no studies have seen traditional snacks as a pillar of local food security and a sustainability path that is in line with UNESCO's sustainable gastronomy concept (Putra & Darmawan, 2025; Yuniar Rifani, 2025). This research offers new contributions in the form of: (1) A conceptual model that connects traditional snacks with gastronomic identity, cultural tourism, and food security; (2) Cross-regional approach of Central Java, not just one city; (3) Integration of the perspective of heritage gastronomy, food identity, and sustainable gastronomy in one study; (4) Reinterpreting market snacks as a sustainability-based cultural tourism asset, not just consumptive culinary.

This research aims to: (1) Excavate and understand the role of traditional snacks as cultural tourism assets in shaping and maintaining local gastronomic identity based on local food ingredients in the Central Java region; (2) Analyze the cultural meaning, public perception, and contribution of the use of local food ingredients in traditional snacks to food security and gastronomic sustainability from the perspective of culinary actors, consumers, and socio-cultural contexts..

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Heritage Gastronomy

The concept of heritage gastronomy views traditional food as part of an intangible cultural heritage that reflects the history, local knowledge, and social relations of a community. (UNESCO, 2003) affirms that traditional culinary practices—including processing techniques, the use of local ingredients, and ritual contexts—are important elements in cultural preservation. Recent studies show that heritage gastronomy is not only concerned with recipes, but also with the cultural narratives and symbolic meanings inherent in food resulting from collaboration with stakeholders (Pedro & Fu, 2020; Sidali et al., 2015).

In the context of Central Java, market snacks such as jenang, gethuk, and jadah are concrete examples of heritage gastronomy that are still practiced for generations. Research by (Hastiningsih & Sari, 2023), shows that gandik in the Dukutan ceremony not only functions as a ritual food, but also as a symbol of cultural identity and an expression of local wisdom of the agrarian community. These findings strengthen the argument that traditional snacks have cultural value that goes beyond mere culinary functions.

2.2 Traditional Snacks as Cultural Tourism Assets

In the study of cultural tourism, local food is increasingly positioned as cultural tourism assets that are able to enrich the tourist experience. (Richards, 2018) states that modern travelers tend to seek authentic experiences that allow them to connect with local life, including through traditional food. In line with that, (UNWTO, 2019) places gastronomy as one of the important pillars in the development of sustainable tourism.

Market snacks, which are generally produced by small business actors in traditional markets, have advantages in terms of authenticity, affordability, and proximity to people's daily lives. (Hastiningsih & Sari, 2023) show that the relationship between traditional snacks and local rituals and traditions strengthens its potential as an attraction for experience-based tourism. Thus, traditional snacks can be understood as a living heritage tourism asset, not just a consumer product.

2.3 Culinary Identity and Consumer Behavior

Culinary identity theory explains that food choices and preferences reflect cultural background, social values, and a sense of belonging to a community (Stalmirska, 2024) asserts that local food serves as a key differentiating asset in destination marketing, helping to establish a unique regional identity that distinguishes one destination from another amid fierce competition. However, research also shows that there is a generational gap in the meaning of traditional foods, where younger generations tend to appreciate taste and visuals, but lack understanding of the origin of ingredients and cultural significance (Ellis et al., 2018).

This phenomenon is relevant to the context of market snacks in Central Java, where modernization and global culinary trends are influencing the way the younger generation views traditional foods. Therefore, understanding culinary identity is key in designing strategies for preserving and promoting traditional snacks as tourism assets.

2.4 Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Gastronomy

Food sovereignty emphasizes the right of communities to determine their own food systems by utilizing local resources in a fair and sustainable manner (FAO, 2019). Within the framework of sustainable gastronomy, the use of local foodstuffs—such as rice, sticky rice, cassava, corn, coconut, and bananas—is seen as a strategy to reduce dependence on imported ingredients and strengthen the local economy (UNWTO, 2019).

Research by (Hastiningsih & Sari, 2023) shows that the use of local corn in making *gandik* reflects the practice of food independence that still survives in Javanese culinary traditions. This is in line with the view that traditional snacks can serve a dual function: as a guardian of cultural identity as well as an instrument of local-based food security and sovereignty. Locally sourced food is essential in bolstering Solo's culinary identity and promoting the sustainability of traditional dishes and supporting the livelihoods of some communities (Hastiningsih, 2025; Hastiningsih & Citra Resmi, 2024)

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an exploratory design, which aims to deeply understand the role of traditional snacks as a cultural tourism asset in strengthening local gastronomic identity and supporting sustainable food security in Central Java. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture the meanings, values, perceptions, and socio-cultural practices inherent in the production and consumption of traditional snacks, which cannot be measured quantitatively.

3.2 Research Location

The research was conducted in several representative regions in Solo Raya that are known to have a wealth of traditional snacks and active people's market activities, namely Surakarta City (Solo), Karanganyar Regency and Sukoharjo. This location was chosen purposively because it represents the variety of Central Javanese gastronomic characters, both in terms of culture,

local food, and culinary tourism potential. The traditional markets that are the focus of the research include Pasar Gede Solo, a traditional market in Karanganyar that is related to the Dukutan tradition, and the people's market in Sukoharjo which still maintain local non-flour snacks.

3.3 Participants

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, with the criteria of having direct involvement in the production, distribution, consumption, or interpretation of traditional snacks. The total participants in this study were 24 people, consisting of: (1) 10 traditional snack traders and producers, who have been running a business for at least 5-10 years and still use local food ingredients such as rice, sticky rice, cassava, corn, bananas, and coconut; (2) 10 traditional snack consumers, representing two age groups (18-30 years and over 40 years old) to capture differences in perception across generations; (3) 4 key informants, consisting of culinary academics, cultural tourism actors, and traditional market managers, who understand the local gastronomic and tourism context. The number of participants was considered adequate in qualitative research because the focus of the study was on the depth of the data, not the statistical generalization.

3.4 Data Collection

Data is collected through three main complementary techniques. First, direct observation was carried out on the production, presentation, and sale of traditional snacks in the people's market. These observations include the types of local food used, processing techniques, traditional packaging, and social interaction between traders and buyers. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner for all participants. The interviews were directed to explore an understanding of the cultural meaning of traditional snacks, perceptions of local foodstuffs, views on culinary modernization, and the potential of traditional snacks as a sustainable cultural and gastronomic tourism attraction. Third, visual documentation and literature studies are carried out through taking product photos, processing processes, packaging, and collecting supporting documents such as cultural archives, scientific articles, and previous research results.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive analysis model, which took place on a cyclical and continuous basis from the data collection stage to final interpretation. The first stage is data reduction, which is the process of sorting, simplifying, and focusing data according to the research objectives. The second stage is the presentation of data in the form of thematic narratives and empirical findings tables that connect the types of snacks, local foodstuffs, cultural meaning, and tourism potential. The third stage is conclusion drawing and verification, which is the process of interpreting meaning to find the patterns, relationships, and theoretical and practical implications of research findings. To maintain the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation of sources and methods, by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

In addition, member checking was carried out on several key participants to ensure that the researchers' interpretations were in accordance with their experiences and meanings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines "Traditional Snacks as Cultural Tourism Assets in Strengthening Local Gastronomic Identity" by analyzing the perception of traditional market snacks, the role of local foodstuffs, cultural meaning, tourism potential, food security, and challenges and expectations

in their preservation.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Participant Category	Number	Percentage	Characteristics
Traditional Snack Producers/Vendors	10	41.7%	Active vendors at Pasar Gede and surrounding areas
Consumers	10	41.7%	Housewives, employees, students, civil servants
Academics/Tourism Actors/Managers	4	16.6%	Culinary academics, cultural tourism actors, market managers

Source : Researcher 2025

1. Perception of Traditional Snacks

- a. Nostalgia & Emosi. As many as 83% of informants (20 people) mentioned that traditional market snacks evoke a sense of nostalgia and emotional attachment.
- b. Simplicity & Authenticity. 92% of informants (22 people) emphasized that market snacks are synonymous with simplicity and authenticity of taste that modern food does not have.
- c. Comparison with Modern Food. All informants (100%) made a comparison between traditional market snacks and modern food. Traditional market snacks are considered still relevant to today's lifestyle because they are emotionally strong (83.3%), cultural (87.5%), and functional (79.2%),
- d. Relevance to Current Lifestyles. 100% of informants agree that innovation is needed to remain attractive to the younger generation.

2. Dominance of Local Food

- a. Non-Wheat Ingredients. 100% traders use non-wheat ingredients: glutinous rice (95%), coconut (90%), cassava (85%), tamarind (80%), rice (75%), bananas (70%), corn (60%). Informant 2 (jadah producer): "If you use flour, it tastes different and is no longer a market snack." Local ingredients meet the principles of food sovereignty: short supply chains, affordable prices, according to "local tastes".
- b. Knowledge of Material Origin. 70% of the informants (17 people) knew for sure that the ingredients used came from local farmers, while 30% (7 people) did not know the details.
- c. Natural Taste Quality. 88% of informants (21 people) stated that local ingredients provide a more natural and distinctive taste quality than imported ingredients.
- d. Health Perception. 75% of informants (18 people) perceive market snacks as healthier food because they use natural ingredients.
- e. Local Availability. 80% of informants (19 people) stated that the availability of local ingredients is still guaranteed, but 20% (5 people) are worried about future price fluctuations and availability.

3. Cultural Meaning and Gastronomic Identity

- a. Traditional Philosophy & Symbols. 75% of participants (18 people) realized that market snacks have a philosophical meaning and a deep symbol of tradition. A getuk trader explained: "In my opinion, the market snacks clearly have cultural meaning. From the past, my parents sold jadah and getuk not only for food, but for hajetan, selamean, traditional events. Every snack has a time, there is a meaning." A producer of blondo jadah added: "The blondo jadah reflects the Javanese people who don't like to be

redundant. Only coconut pulp is used. That's the value of life that is inherited through food."

- b. **Regional Identity.** 88% of participants (21 people) stated that market snacks are a strong identity of the Central Java region. A klepon producer stated: "In Central Java, market snacks are an identity. People see klepon, tiwul, or mendut, and immediately know this is Javanese food. It's not just the taste, but the way it's made, the banana leaf wrapping, it's all culture." A serabi trader added: "Serabi is very typical of Solo. From the way he cooks using braziers, using coconut milk, it's culture. So it's not just a cake, it's a legacy."
- c. **Social and Ritual Functions.** 67% of participants (16 people) mentioned the social function and ritual of market snacks in people's lives. Market snacks have a role in: (1) Selamatan and Hajatan, (2) Thanksgiving and prayer, (3) Birth events, (4) Traditional celebrations, and (5) Friendship between neighbors.
- d. **Generation Gap.** 88% of participants (21 people) identified a generational gap in understanding the cultural meaning of market snacks. A jenang trader stated that unfortunately now young people only know that it is delicious, even though in the past every snack had a story. A lemet producer added that many young people now do not know the meaning of the philosophy, they eat, take pictures, and then finish. A young 23-year-old consumer admits that he knows this is a traditional food, but he doesn't really understand the cultural meaning and usually only eats because it's delicious.

4. Traditional Snacks as Cultural Tourism Assets

- a. **Local Food Sovereignty**
83% of participants (20 people) saw market snacks as a potential culinary tourism attraction. A getuk trader stated: "I see that the market snacks can be very attractive to tourists. Many buyers from outside the city come to the market in search of traditional food. They are curious about the taste and how to make it." A jenang producer added: "Tourists often ask about the history of jenang for what it is used for, why does it taste like that. This means that market snacks are not just food, but stories."
- b. **Reducing Import Dependence**
79% of participants (19 people) stated that traditional markets are cultural spaces that support culinary tourism. A getuk trader explained: "The traditional market has actually become a tourist attraction, but it has not been seriously arranged."
- c. **Storytelling Culinary.** 71% of participants (17 people) realized the importance of storytelling in packaging market snacks as tourism products. An onde-onde producer stated: "Food tourism is now not just about eating, but experiencing. A market piece could be that."
- d. **Product Packaging & Visualization.** 92% of participants (22 people) agreed that market snacks need to be repackaged to attract tourists, while maintaining traditional elements. A getuk trader explained: "When it comes to packaging, I think it can be updated as long as it doesn't feel changed." A jenang producer added: "The packaging can be made neater, but still use leaves or traditional elements."
- e. **Experiential Tourism.** 67% of participants (16 people) saw the potential of market snacks as a tourist experience that involves interaction and process. A serabi trader stated: "Serabi is often sought after by local tourists, especially when cooked in a furnace. It's a spectacle too."

5. Food Security and Sustainability

- a. **Local Food Sovereignty.** 90% of participants (22 people) stated that the market snacks support local food sovereignty. A gethuk trader stated: "I believe that local ingredients such as cassava are very supportive of food security. Cassava is easy to get, many local farmers plant. If we continue to use those ingredients, we don't depend on wheat flour from the outside." A klepon manufacturer added: "Local ingredients are definitely safer and cheaper. Sticky rice, coconut, brown sugar are from their own area."
- b. **Reduction of Import Dependency**
83% of participants (20 people) saw market snacks as a solution to reduce dependence on imported ingredients. A klepon producer stated: "If everything uses imported materials, small traders like me are heavy. Market snacks are actually the solution." A jenang producer added: "When it comes to food security, market snacks are clearly supportive. The ingredients are not dependent on imports."
- c. **SME Sustainability**
75% of participants (18 people) stated that the sustainability of market snacks is closely related to the continuity of local MSMEs. A gethuk trader stated: "As long as there are still people buying, this market snack can continue to run."
- d. **Traditional Production Practices**
100% of traders/producers (10 people) maintain traditional production practices from generation to generation. A jenang producer stated: "Market snacks are a heritage. My grandmother used to sell jenang too."
- e. **Environmental Value**
71% of participants (17 people) are aware of the environmental value of market snacks (low waste, local). A 38-year-old consumer stated: "The market snacks have been environmentally friendly for a long time. We don't use a lot of plastic, the materials are local."

6. Challenges and Expectations

- a. **Modernization vs Authenticity**
Challenge: Balancing modernization with preserving authenticity. A getuk trader stated: "The biggest challenge is now that there are fewer and fewer buyers, especially young people. They prefer modern snacks with good packaging." A manufacturer of onde-onde added: "Now consumers want to be practical. Market snacks are considered complicated."
Hope: A getuk trader stated: "I hope that the government can often make market snack events or festivals so that our goods are known again. If it is innovation, I think the packaging can be improved, but the taste should not be changed."
- b. **Digitization and Branding**
Challenge: Lack of mastery of digital technology and branding. A nagasari producer stated: "In my opinion, the challenge is marketing. I hope there is an online platform specifically for market snacks." An onde-onde producer added: "I hope that the market snacks can enter hotels or official events. Innovation is enough in packaging and branding."
- c. **Business Succession**
Challenge: Young people are not interested in continuing their business. A klepon producer stated: "Another challenge is regeneration, my own children don't want to continue. I hope that there will be training from the campus or the office so that this

market snack seems to have a future." A Jadhah trader added: "If there is no regeneration in the future, its sustainability could be disrupted."

Hope: A merchant said: "I hope schools will introduce more."

d. Government Support

Hope: One consumer stated: "I hope the government helps promote culinary tourism."

A traditional market manager added: "We hope that the traditional market will become a culinary education space. Innovation can be achieved through the use of traditional cuisine."

e. Role of Academics

Hope: A culinary academic stated: "Academically, the challenge of the market snacks is the lack of scientific documentation and research-based innovation. I hope that the collaboration between the campus, the market, and the government will be strengthened." A mendut producer added: "I hope the campus and the government will come down directly. Innovation is enough to look and tell the product."

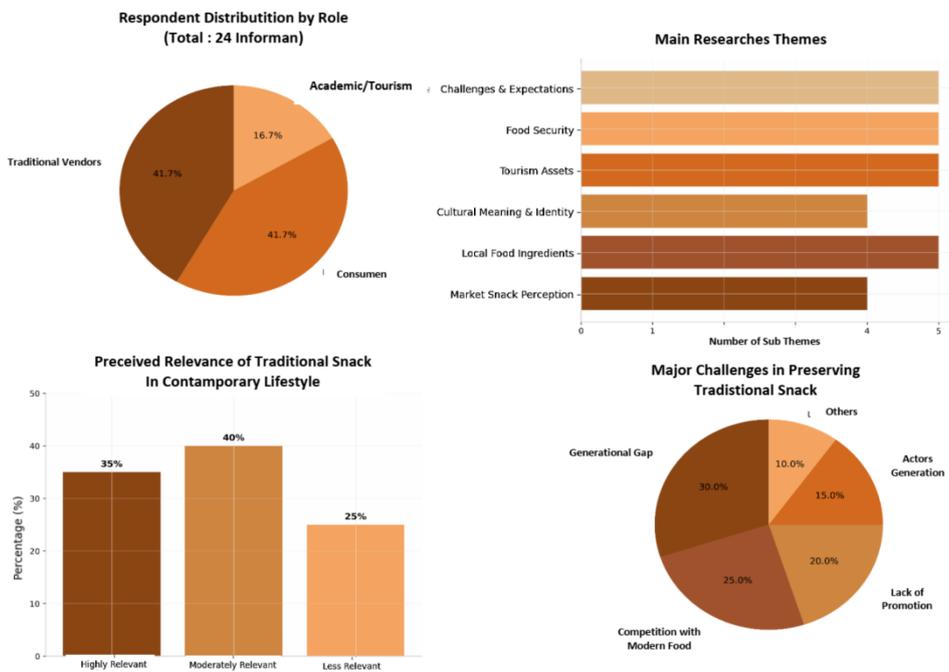


Figure 1. Summary of Respondents, Thematic Analysis, Perceived Relevance, and Preservation Challenges of Traditional Snacks. Source : Researcher 2025

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of traditional snacks as cultural tourism assets in strengthening local gastronomic identity in Central Java, with a focus on the use of local food ingredients and their contribution to food security and sustainability. Through in-depth interviews with 24 participants—including producers, consumers, and tourism actors—this research reveals that traditional snacks are not merely food products, but repositories of cultural knowledge, symbols of regional identity, and strategic assets for sustainable gastronomy.

The findings demonstrate that traditional snacks remain relevant in contemporary society, with 95% of participants affirming their cultural and culinary significance. The exclusive use of

local ingredients—such as glutinous rice, cassava, coconut, and palm sugar—by 100% of producers highlights the strong connection between traditional snacks and local food systems. This practice not only preserves culinary authenticity but also supports local food sovereignty and reduces dependency on imported ingredients, thereby contributing to food security and sustainability.

However, the study also identifies significant challenges, particularly the generational gap in understanding the cultural meanings behind traditional snacks. While younger consumers appreciate the taste, they often lack awareness of the cultural narratives and traditional knowledge embedded in these foods. This gap underscores the urgent need for innovative strategies in cultural interpretation, education, and promotion to ensure the continuity of traditional gastronomic heritage.

The integration of traditional snacks into cultural tourism presents a promising pathway for strengthening local gastronomic identity while supporting rural and urban economies. By positioning traditional snacks as experiential tourism products—combining taste, storytelling, and cultural immersion—destinations can create unique value propositions that attract culturally curious tourists and contribute to sustainable development.

Future research should explore the nutritional profiles of traditional snacks, investigate value-added product innovations, and evaluate digital marketing strategies that enhance the visibility of traditional snacks in the tourism sector. Collaboration between government, academia, local communities, and tourism stakeholders is essential for developing comprehensive strategies that preserve cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary market demands.

In conclusion, traditional snacks in Central Java represent a vital cultural tourism asset that embodies heritage values while offering a pathway toward sustainable local gastronomy.

Their preservation and promotion require a balanced approach that respects authenticity while embracing necessary innovations in packaging, branding, and storytelling. By recognizing traditional snacks as living heritage, Central Java can strengthen its gastronomic identity and contribute to the global movement toward sustainable and culturally-rooted food systems.

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