

Exploring Gastronomic Value in Increasing the Competitive Advantage of Traditional Restaurants

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the factors influencing the formation of gastronomic value and how these factors can create a competitive advantage for traditional restaurants. In the culinary context, gastronomic value encompasses the quality of ingredients, menu innovation, restaurant atmosphere, sensory experience, and sense of place, which serve to differentiate restaurants in an increasingly competitive culinary market. This study uses a descriptive approach and case studies with three traditional restaurants as subjects: Warung Kopi Klotok in Yogyakarta, RM Pawon Sego Lego in Mojokerto, and Warung Rempah in Batu. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with owners, managers, and customers, and analysed using QSR-NVivo software. The results indicate that factors such as the use of high-quality local ingredients, an atmosphere that reflects local culture, and sensory experiences play a crucial role in building gastronomic value. Furthermore, restaurants that create a strong sense of place, combining authentic cuisine and a supportive atmosphere, can strengthen their competitiveness in the culinary market.

Keywords: Gastronomic Value; Competitive Advantage; Competitive Advantage; Sensory Experience; Sense of Place.

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Received: 22-09-2024

Revised: 30-09-2025

Accepted: 15-10-2025

Published: 30-11-2025



1. Pendahuluan

Indonesia is a multicultural country rich in diverse cultures. This diversity gives rise to unique characteristics for each region, particularly in the culinary arts. Numerous restaurants throughout Indonesia offer dishes that reflect local cuisine. Traditional restaurants are thriving, serving a variety of specialties to preserve their regional cuisine (Wijaya, 2019). Restaurants can create positive perceptions by offering diverse dishes, décor, atmosphere, and views for consumers to enjoy. Integrating local culture into the décor of these restaurants creates distinctive characteristics (Palupi & Abdillah, 2019). They become more attractive to tourists if spatial planning, décor, environment, and culture are well-integrated (L. Liu & Zhao, 2024). In this context, people perceive traditional restaurants as a form of cultural service available to tourists (Clemes et al., 2013).

Traditional restaurants are destinations where tourists can enjoy local cuisine representing a region's uniqueness (Kan et al., 2022), and tourists prefer those with authentic ethnic heritage. Therefore, traditional restaurants must create an attractive impression for consumers while maintaining cultural elements. Decorations such as furniture style, lighting, paintings, and amenities can shape visitors' perceptions. Adding cultural elements to restaurant attributes attracts tourists' attention and serves as a starting point in the customer decision-making process (Heung & Gu, 2012).

Traditional restaurants are typically known for serving dishes with distinctive flavours using fresh, high-quality, local spices (Clemes et al., 2013). These establishments offer delicious and authentic foods that are unique to their region. Consumers' sensory perceptions are influenced by various restaurant attributes that have a cultural impact. Sensory elements shape the initial step in the consumer decision-making process, enabling the assessment of all services provided (Garaus et al., 2023). Listening to music while dining enhances the enjoyment, especially when played at a low volume and a slow tempo, for a calming effect. Traditional restaurants that feature local music add valuable cultural experiences (Esparza Huamanchumo et al., 2023; Nyamekye et al., 2023).

A restaurant's gastronomic value created through the use of unique, high-quality local products and signature recipes serves as a symbol of prestige that differentiates restaurants and enhances their brand value. Therefore, gastronomy directly shapes competitive advantage for both restaurants and culinary destinations by leveraging local and unique products.

Gastronomy and cuisine are distinct. Cuisine is both a process and its result—the sum of dishes produced, tools used, and techniques applied, yielding various types such as traditional cuisine (Kostkova & Pellesova, 2021). Gastronomy is a broader concept, encompassing the close relationship between food, related activities, and culinary practices.

Traditional restaurants utilise ancestral techniques (Youn et al., 2019) and purchase raw materials from local producers. The food quality is ensured by using ingredients recognised for their excellence (Youn et al., 2020). By combining authentic flavours from high-quality ingredients with traditional techniques, these restaurants create gastronomic value that differentiates them from others.

This study aims to examine how gastronomic value shapes the competitive advantage of traditional restaurants in Indonesia, especially by leveraging sensory elements in the dining experience.

2. Methods

This research adopted a descriptive approach, focusing on the role of three traditional restaurants in creating gastronomic value and engaging customers through authentic, quality culinary experiences. A case study approach was also used to gain an in-depth understanding of how traditional restaurants construct their gastronomic value and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the culinary market.

QSR-NVivo software was used to analyse the interview transcripts in two stages: the first stage organised the findings into initial categories. These categories were then reanalysed, yielding findings related to factors influencing customers' perceptions and experiences of the gastronomic value offered by traditional restaurants. This iterative, word-search-based data analysis, a good practice in qualitative data analysis (Neale, 2016), aimed to uncover gastronomic elements that shape the culinary experience and customer satisfaction.

The guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews in this study were developed through a synthesis and critical interpretation of recent research in culinary tourism, with a particular emphasis on restaurants promoting traditional and authentic cuisine (Richards, 2021; Sio et al., 2024). Previous studies exploring how traditional restaurants serve as guardians of culinary heritage provide valuable methodological precedent (Maziriri et al., 2021). Furthermore, theoretical frameworks from studies emphasising sense of place, place branding, and the role of restaurants in cultural preservation were considered to develop questions that explored the in-depth relationship between recipe authenticity, cultural narratives, and the creation of unique dining experiences in traditional cuisine restaurants (Hernández-Rojas & Huete Alcocer, 2021; Smith, 2015).

The informant selection used purposive sampling to target traditional cuisine restaurants that distinctly represent varied forms of gastronomic value aligned with the research objectives. The three selected case study restaurants were Warung Kopi Klotok (Yogyakarta), RM Pawon Sego Lego (Mojokerto), and Warung Rempah (Batu, Malang), each chosen for its alignment with different value characteristics relevant to this study.

The selection of these three restaurants was based on their conceptual fit with the research focus, with each representing a specific aspect of gastronomic value. Warung Kopi Klotok in Yogyakarta was chosen for its representation of interactive and nostalgic culinary experiences, where value stems from both the dishes and the participatory 'ngopi klotok' process. RM Pawon Sego Lego in Mojokerto was selected to exemplify gastronomic value rooted in cultural heritage and authenticity, highlighted by traditional recipes and the 'Sego Lego' concept in a traditional kitchen setting. Warung Rempah in Batu, Malang, was chosen for its gastronomic value grounded in health and functionality, showcasing local wisdom around spices. This case selection enabled examination of diverse approaches to gastronomic value among traditional restaurants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with owners, managers, and customers of traditional restaurants in the cities of Yogyakarta, Mojokerto, and Malang. Each interview session lasted an average of 30 to 90 minutes and was conducted face-to-face at the business premises. All interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining written informed consent from the participants, to ensure data accuracy and facilitate in-depth analysis. Table 1 describes the demographics of the research informants and their respective roles in the traditional restaurant business study.

Informant Code	Informant Role	Interview Location	Gender
P1	Owner	RM Kopi Klotok	Female
P2	Owner	RM Pawon Sego Lego	Male
P3	Owner	RM Rempah Batu	Male
M1	Manager	RM Kopi Klotok	Male
M2	Manager	RM Pawon Sego Lego	Male
M3	Manager	RM Rempah Batu	Female
K1	Costumer	RM Kopi Klotok	Female
K2	Costumer	RM Kopi Klotok	Female
K3	Costumer	RM Pawon Sego Lego	Male

distinctive flavours of local dishes are key draws for customers seeking a unique experience. Unique food presentation is also seen as an important element in building gastronomic value.

5. Competition and Competitiveness

The word "competitive" reflects restaurants' efforts to differentiate themselves in a competitive culinary market. Gastronomic value here serves as a tool to create a competitive advantage, where restaurants use quality local ingredients and create a unique experience for customers.

6. Culinary Factors That Attract Customers

"Factors" and "customers" indicate that restaurants place significant emphasis on various elements that attract consumers, including taste, atmosphere, and food quality. Restaurant owners acknowledge that customers tend to choose restaurants that offer not only delicious food but also a unique atmosphere and experience.

Gastronomy has become an increasingly important resource in the development of the restaurant business, creating a need for gastronomic studies and fostering the development of the concept of gastronomic tourism. QSR-Nvivo was also used to analyse themes from interviews with owners, managers, and customers of three traditional restaurants. Table 2 presents the results of the content analysis related to the themes that emerged in exploring the gastronomic value of the restaurants Kopi Klotok, Pawon Sego Lego, and Warung Rempah in Batu.

Informant	Quality of Raw Materials and Menu Innovation	Atmosphere and Ambiance of the Restaurant	Sensory Experience (Taste, Aroma, and Presentation)	Perception of the Restaurant's Uniqueness
P1	1	1	1	1
P2	1	1	1	1
P3	1	1	1	
M1	1	1	1	1
M2	1	1	1	
M3	1	1		
K1	1		1	1
K2			1	1
K3	1	1	1	1
K4	1	1	1	1
K5	1	1		
K6	1	1		

Table 2. Analysis of the Thematic Gastronomic Value Content of Traditional Restaurants

High gastronomic value can be achieved when sensory elements are aligned with authentic flavours, enticing aromas, attractive visual presentations, and an atmosphere that supports a comprehensive culinary experience. These elements create an immersive experience that aims to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty to traditional restaurants.

Raw Material Quality and Menu Innovation

One of the most important factors in establishing gastronomic value is the quality of the ingredients and innovation in the menu. Restaurant owners often emphasise the importance of using high-quality local ingredients that can enhance the flavour of the food. This result aligns with previous research findings showing that dishes made with fresh, high-quality local ingredients have a greater appeal to consumers (Gonda et al., 2021).

P3: "We only use local coffee from local farmers. We want customers to experience the authentic taste of the coffee and also provide them with an immersion in local coffee culture."

M3: "We use high-quality local spices to ensure that each dish delivers an authentic and rich flavor."

Research by Malota & Mucsi (2023) on national identity shows that local cuisine plays a crucial role in shaping a region's cultural identity, reflected in the quality of the ingredients used. Restaurants that maintain the quality of their ingredients and innovate their menus can strengthen their gastronomic value and attract customers seeking unique and authentic culinary experiences.

Restaurant Atmosphere and Ambiance

The restaurant atmosphere, including the decor, lighting, and comfort of the dining area, plays a crucial role in creating a profound experience for customers. The sense of place created by the restaurant's atmosphere can enhance customers' emotional attachment to the food they enjoy. Restaurants with a comfortable atmosphere that reflects local culture are more appreciated by customers, who seek culinary experiences that are not only delicious but also visually and emotionally pleasing (C.-H. Liu et al., 2022).

P2: "Nasi lego is rice served with a full complement of side dishes. Although many restaurants offer the sego lego concept, Pawon Sego Lego offers a distinct dining experience, which requires interaction with other diners and offers the typical atmosphere of a traditional house."

P3: "We strive to create an authentic atmosphere, inviting customers not only to enjoy coffee but also to enjoy the tranquil atmosphere of Yogyakarta."

A restaurant atmosphere that reflects local culture can enhance and enrich the culinary experience. Restaurants that can create an atmosphere that supports local food and culture will more easily build customer loyalty and differentiate themselves from competitors (Nyamekye et al., 2023).

Sensory Experience (Taste, Aroma, and Presentation)

Sensory elements, such as taste, aroma, and presentation, play a significant role in creating a memorable culinary experience. In this study, gastronomic value was measured not only by taste but also by aroma and the way the food was presented. This sensory experience can significantly influence customer satisfaction and encourage them to return to the restaurant (Bichler et al., 2021).

P3: "Spice cuisine is our cultural heritage. Using rich local spices to create dishes that truly reflect Javanese flavors is also an art form."

K2: "The way the food and coffee are presented here is truly unique. Every time I walk in, I can immediately smell the delicious aroma of coffee. That's what makes me want to linger."

Sensory elements such as aroma and taste significantly influence consumers' decisions to stay at a restaurant. Restaurants that maximise their sensory experiences can create more substantial gastronomic value and build greater appeal (Esparza et al., 2023).

Distinctive Perception

The distinctive perception formed through local cuisine is an important factor in building customers' emotional attachment to the restaurant. Cuisine rich in tradition and cultural identity can strengthen the sense of place and create a more immersive experience for customers. In interviews, many owners and managers mentioned that they strive to connect the food with local culture, further strengthening the restaurant's appeal.

M1: "We want every customer who comes here to experience the traditional atmosphere of Yogyakarta. That's why we use decorations that reflect local culture."

Research by L. Liu & Zhao (2024) emphasises that the theme of a place connected to local cuisine is essential in shaping cultural identity and building a strong attraction for customers.

Factors that Form Gastronomic Value and Competitive Advantage in Traditional Restaurants.

The main factors that shape gastronomic value include the quality of raw ingredients, menu innovation, restaurant atmosphere, sensory experience, and sense of place. High-quality ingredients and menu innovation contribute to the formation of gastronomic value, distinguishing restaurants from competitors (Gonda et al., 2021; Malota & Mucsi, 2023). An atmosphere that reflects local culture, while also enhancing the customer experience, creates a deep sense of place that enriches the customer's relationship with the restaurant (C.-H. Liu et al., 2022). Furthermore, sensory experiences, such as taste, aroma, and presentation, are crucial in building gastronomic value (Bichler et al., 2021).

Competitive advantage can be created through the integration of these elements, which not only enhances customer satisfaction but also differentiates restaurants in an increasingly competitive culinary market (Nyamekye et al., 2023). By leveraging uniqueness through authentic food quality, atmosphere, and sensory experiences, restaurants can strengthen their position and create a competitive advantage in MSME-scale restaurants (Banerjee & Quinn, 2022).

4. Conclusion

Factors that shape gastronomic value include the quality of raw ingredients, menu innovation, restaurant atmosphere, sensory experience, and unique perceptions of the restaurant, all playing a crucial role in creating a competitive advantage for traditional restaurants. The use of quality local ingredients and the application of authentic culinary techniques provide added value, distinguishing the restaurant from competitors. A supportive atmosphere, reflecting local culture, creates an emotional connection and experience with customers, strengthening the restaurant's brand image as an authentic and unique place. Furthermore, an adequate sensory experience, including the taste, aroma, and presentation of the food, further enriches the customer experience and strengthens the gastronomic value offered.

By implementing these factors, traditional restaurants can not only attract new customers but also strengthen customer loyalty and create a competitive advantage. The gastronomic value developed can serve as a strategy for survival and competition in an increasingly competitive culinary market.

The researcher would like to thank the Directorate of Research and Community Service - Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology - Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia for funding the implementation of this research through Hibah Penelitian Dosen Pemula Fiscal year of 2025.

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