



Transformation and Relevance of Traditional East Javanese Cakes in The Modern Era: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's cultural diversity is reflected in its traditional cakes, which represent local identity and heritage. However, modernization and globalization have shifted consumer preferences toward practical, visually appealing, and innovative foods, reducing interest in traditional products. This study reviews the transformation of traditional East Javanese cakes in terms of form, cultural value, consumer perception, and adaptation strategies by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). A systematic literature review approach was applied by analyzing relevant scholarly articles published between 2020 and 2025. The results indicate that traditional cakes remain culturally significant but require continuous innovation in ingredients, presentation, packaging, and marketing to maintain relevance. Digital platforms and social media play a key role in expanding market reach, particularly among younger consumers. Despite challenges such as declining interest, limited packaging innovation, and distribution constraints, opportunities remain through product diversification, branding strategies, and certification to support long-term sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation, possesses extraordinary diversity in culture, religion, ethnicity, traditions, languages, and communities. Each society maintains a distinct cultural identity that differentiates it from others. This identity may manifest in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Maziyah & Indrahti, 2019). One form of intangible cultural heritage is traditional cuisine, particularly traditional cakes. However, with the progression of time, the existence of traditional cakes is increasingly being replaced by modern food products. This phenomenon is supported by Sophianti & Bashori (2024), who stated that modernization in lifestyle tends to increase consumer preference for practical and instant food, thereby contributing to the decline of traditional food consumption.

The primary issue that arises is whether traditional cakes remain relevant amidst shifting consumer preferences and globalization. Furthermore, how have their forms, perceptions, and embedded values transformed over time? Many traditional cakes have undergone adaptations in terms of appearance, taste, and packaging to align with modern market demands (Pohan et al., 2024). In addition, consumer perceptions especially among younger generations have shifted toward foods that are aesthetically appealing, trendy, and convenient to consume. This shift compels culinary industry actors to innovate traditional products to ensure their sustainability (Widiati & Azkia, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to review the literature related to the transformation of traditional East Javanese cakes, particularly in terms of form, cultural value, consumer perception, and adaptation strategies employed by micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) or local producers. This review is expected to provide insights into the importance of preserving traditional cakes through innovative approaches without compromising their original identity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a systematic review approach. In the initial stage, the researcher conducted identification, analysis, and compilation of accredited journals relevant to the research topic (Muhrib et al., 2023). A literature review is a scientific approach that provides an overview of the evolution of a particular subject and is used to address specific research problems (Cahyono et al., 2019). The steps involved in the systematic literature review method include identifying and determining keywords related to the research topic, conducting literature searches, screening using inclusion and exclusion criteria, and performing analysis.

Keyword Identification

This study focuses on the transformation of traditional East Javanese cakes in the modern era. Therefore, the following criteria were established:

Criterion 1 : The present of concepts related to traditional East Javanese cakes.

Criterion 2 : The presence of ideas related to culinary transformation in Indonesia.

Keywords used include : East Javanese culinary culture, traditional food trends, traditional food innovation, and marketing.

Literature Search, Screening and Analysis

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar based on the predetermined keywords, resulting in approximately 90 articles published in 2020 to 2025. Following the search process, articles were screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 20 selected journal articles indexed in SINTA were used as primary data, supported by relevant secondary sources.

Inclusion criteria : Studies discussing the transformation of traditional cakes in the modern era, and journal indexed in SINTA.

Exclusion criteria : Studies not related to the transformation of traditional cakes.

Selected literature that met the criteria was analyzed and synthesized to address the research question regarding the relevance of traditional East Javanese cakes in the modern era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Traditional East Javanese Cakes

Traditional cakes are categorized as light snacks rather than staple foods; however, traditional cakes play a significant role in the cultural identity of a region (Maghfoiroh et al., 2025). Generally, traditional cakes exhibit diverse flavors, ranging from sweetness derived from sugar and palm sugar to savory notes contributed by coconut milk. The primary ingredient typically includes various type of flour, such as rice flour, wheat flour, tapioca flour, and cornstarch (Ningsih & Rasyid, 2024). Traditional Indonesian cakes represent diverse range of sweet and savory snacks derived from locally available natural resources, prepared using region-specific techniques, tools, and preservation styles. Beyond their culinary function, these products embody symbolic meanings associated with local traditions, as well as the philosophical values and belief systems of the communities in which they originate (Binur & Dewiani, 2020). This reflects a strong interconnection between traditional cakes and local wisdom. Broadly, traditional Indonesian cakes can be classified into several categories:

1. Wet cakes (kue basah): These cakes are characterized by a soft, tender, and slightly chewy texture, with a relatively short shelf life, typically lasting only one to two days at room temperature. Wet cakes are commonly prepared through steaming or boiling processes and are made from ingredients such as rice flour, coconut milk, and either granulated or palm sugar.
2. Dry cakes (kue kering): These products have a low moisture content due to baking or frying processes, resulting in a longer shelf life compared to other types of cakes. Consequently, dry cakes frequently distributed as souvenirs.
3. Market snacks (Jajanan pasar): This term refers to a wide variety of affordable snack items, including both et and dry cakes, typically sold in traditional markets. These snacks are distinguished by their unique flavors and distinctive names, which often reflect their regional origins and enhance consumer recognition (Ghufar & Suhandano, 2022).
4. Ceremonial cakes: In addition to their role as snacks, certain cakes hold significant symbolic and spiritual importance within local cultural contexts. These cakes are commonly presented during traditional ceremonies, where their selection is determined not only by taste and appearance but also by their underlying meanings and philosophical significance (Raodah, 2024).

Tabel 1. Traditional cakes in East Java

No	Cake name	Description	Modification
1.	Onde-Onde	Traditional cake originating from East Java, Indonesia. Made from glutinous rice flour shaped into spherical forms, filled with sweetened mung bean paste, coated with sesame seeds, and deep-fried until golden brown.	Modifying Onde-onde skin to be colorful, its called "Rainbow Onde-onde". Besides that, there are also innovations in the variations filling flavor, such as adding cheese, blueberry, and pandan (Arisah et al., 2024).
2.	Wingko Babat	Traditional East Javanese cake made from a mixture of grated coconut, glutinous rice flour, and granulated sugar, which is shaped into round portions and baked to produce a distinctive texture and a rich of savory flavor.	Using aluminium foil packaging will extend the self life of Wingko babat. Furthermore, providing complete product information on the packaging can also provide clarify to consumers (Hamidah et al., 2024).
3.	Getuk Pisang	A Traditional Indonesian snack from Kediri, East Java, made from mashed Raja Nangka bananas (a type of plantain). It has a distinct sweet-sour taste, firm texture, and is wrapped in banana leaves.	By creating an innovation of fermented Getuk Pisang which uses microbes from tape yeast, can break down carbohydrates into simple sugars, resulting in a product that has a natural sweet taste without sugar, natural color without artificial coloring, and a better texture (Lestari & Susanto, 2019).
4.	Brem	It is primarily an Indonesian traditional fermented rice food or beverage.	One effective strategy to sustain the presence of Brem and enhance its market visibility is the adoption of online marketing. In particular, social media platforms can be leveraged to expand product exposure and reach a broader audience (Citaningtyas et al., 2021).
5.	Getuk Singkong	A traditional Javanese snack made primarily from boiled or steamed cassava, sweetened, and mashed.	An innovative approach to Getuk Singkong is its transformation into crispy chips, which provide crunchy texture while preserving the product's characteristic flavor (Nisa et al., 2024).
6.	Klepon	Traditional Indonesian sweet snack. It consists of small, boiled glutinous rice balls filled with liquid palm sugar and coated in grated coconut, often colored green with pandan leaves.	An innovative approach to Klepon is use additional breadfruit flour in making Klepon (Multidisiplin et al., 2020).
7.	Lapis Surabaya	A classic Indonesian cake. It originated in Surabaya, East Java, three-layer cake usually featuring yellow sponge cake on the top and bottom with chocolate layer in the middle, held together by jam.	Innovation may be achieved by introducing diverse flavor variations in each layer, thereby enhancing product differentiation and preventing monotony (Prameswari & Oetarjo, 2022).
8.	Kue Dadar Gulung	One of popular traditional snack of sweet coconut pancake. It is a traditional green-colored crepe or omelette, flavored with pandan, filled with sweet grated coconut and palm sugar.	One potential innovation involves incorporating Cilembu sweet potato into the batter to enhance product variation (Prasastono et al., 2022).
9.	Kue Putu Ayu	It is a soft, fluffy, mini cake topped with savory shredded coconut, often molded into a flower shape.	Inclusion of dragon fruit peel flour in Putu Ayu dough may serve as a novel approach to improve consumer appeal (Handayani et al., 2025).

Transformation of Traditional Cakes

In the context of intensifying global competition, creativity and innovation are essential for preserving local food products, including traditional cakes (Arisah et al., 2024). Modernization and globalization have significantly influenced consumer preferences, emphasizing aesthetics, nutritional value, and convenience in food choices. Consequently, food industry stakeholders are required not only to preserve the authenticity and cultural identity of traditional cakes but also to introduce innovations across multiple dimensions (Gustian et al., 2024). Innovation in raw materials aimed at enhancing nutritional quality can provide healthier alternatives. For instance, substituting glutinous rice flour with breadfruit flour in the production of Klepon can increase dietary fiber content (Multidisiplin et al., 2020); In addition, the application of natural fermentation techniques may reduce sugar usage while extending product shelf life (Lestari & Susanto, 2019). Moreover, innovations in form and visual presentation contribute to making traditional cake more appealing and better aligned with contemporary market preferences, particularly among younger consumers. These include the use of natural or artificial colour variations and adoption of modern packaging designs. Packaging plays a critical role not only in preserving product quality and extending shelf life but also in enhancing market attractiveness, especially within the rapidly growing e-commerce sector. Examples of modified East Javanese traditional cakes were shown in Table 1.

Relevance in the Modern Era

The culinary sector is currently undergoing rapid expansion, accompanied by increasingly intense competition within the food industry. This dynamic compels businesses to continuously introduce innovations across multiple aspects, including processing methods, product form, flavor profiles, and packaging, in order to remain aligned with evolving market demands (Hakim & Hamidah, 2022). Moreover, the forces of globalization and modernization have significantly influenced consumer behavior, with a growing preference for convenient foods that offer diverse flavor options (Pohan et al., 2024). This shift has distributed to a declining interest in traditional foods, particularly among younger generations, thereby intensifying competition between traditional culinary products and the proliferation of modern food offerings (Puteri & Subagio, 2024).

One viable approach to addressing this challenge is through product innovation. For instance, in East Java, traditional Onde-onde has been transformed into visually appealing “Rainbow Onde-onde” with enhanced flavor variations (Arisah et al., 2024). Such innovations have the potential to renew interest in traditional products among younger consumers. Nevertheless, innovation alone is insufficient; it must be complemented by effective marketing strategies to ensure broader consumer recognition.

In the digital era, the rapid growth of social media and e-commerce platforms presents substantial opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to expand their market reach, particularly in promoting traditional cakes (Masrukhan & Isnaini, 2020). The utilization of digital technologies especially content marketing via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, enables MSMEs to strengthen brand identity through storytelling and efficiently engage a wider audience (Mardikaningsih et al., 2024).

From sectoral perspective, MSMEs in Indonesia are predominantly concentrated in the trade and retail sector, accounting for approximately 63% of all MSME business units. As of 2023, data from Ministry of Trade indicate that around 22 million MSMEs (33.6% of the total) have integrated into the digital economy (INDEF, 2024). This suggests that a significant proportion of MSMEs have adopted e-commerce platforms for commercial activities. In addition to Shopee, commonly used platforms include Facebook Marketplace (33.46%), Instagram Shop (28.74%), and TikTok Shop (20.8%). Furthermore, approximately 17.3% of MSMEs utilize online food delivery applications as part of their sales channels.

Challenges and Opportunities

Globalization and modernization have substantially reshaped consumer taste preferences, with a growing tendency toward foods that are convenient and offer diverse sensory characteristics (Pohan et al., 2024). This shift contributed to a declining level of interest in traditional cakes among younger generations, thereby placing them in direct competition with modern food products. One example is Getuk, a traditional delicacy that not only represents Indonesia’s cultural heritage but also embodies historical significance for the communities from which it originates. Consequently, preserving such traditional foods is essential in the face of the increasing dominance of modern culinary products (Andriyanti & Setiawan, 2024).

Nevertheless, several constraints hinder the preservation and development of traditional cakes, limiting their competitiveness in contemporary markets (Haikal et al., 2024). These challenges include:

1. Declining interest among younger consumers, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, who tend to favor modern food options, thereby necessitating adaption in product presentation to align with current preferences.

2. Limitations in packaging design, as traditional food packaging is often simple and less appealing to modern consumers.
3. Distribution and market access issues, which require more strategic planning to enable broader market penetration.
4. Insufficient regeneration of skilled artisans, resulting in limited transmission of traditional cake-making knowledge to younger generations and posing risks to future production sustainability.
5. Scarcity of raw materials, driven by climate change and land-use conversion, which further constrains the continuity of traditional food production.

Within the culinary sector, marketing strategies play a pivotal role in introducing products to a wider consumer base. The implementation of effective strategies not only facilitates market expansion but also enhances product competitiveness and support business sustainability (Widiati & Azkia, 2023). Additionally, marketing efforts contribute to fulfilling consumer needs strengthening market segmentation and establishing a strong brand identity (Yarlina & Hunda, 2021).

To improve the visibility of traditional cakes in both domestic and international markets, adaptive marketing and branding strategies aligned with current consumer trends are essential. Key approaches include:

1. Digital marketing and social media utilization: Leveraging platforms such as e-commerce, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook serves as an effective means to reach broader audiences, enhance consumer engagement, and significantly expand market reach (Wasan & Sariningsih, 2021).
2. Product packaging innovation: The adoption of visually appealing, environmentally sustainable, and functional packaging is critical for attracting consumers attention. Packaging that reflects product identity, utilizes high-quality materials, and incorporates user-friendly features can enhance both market value and visual appeal, particularly in digital marketplaces (Raodah, 2024).
3. Product certification and standardization: Obtaining certifications, such as food safety and halal certification, serves as a key factor in building consumer trust, especially in global markets. Such certifications significantly influence purchasing decisions and consumer preferences toward traditional products at both national and international levels (Fadhil 3t al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that traditional East Javanese cakes remain relevant in the modern era, provided that they undergo adaptive transformation aligned with contemporary consumer demands. Innovation in ingredients, processing, packaging, and marketing has enabled these product to sustain their presence in competitive markets. However, maintaining their cultural authenticity while embracing modernization remains a critical challenge. Therefore, a balanced approach that integrates preservation and innovation is essential. Future efforts should focus on strengthening institutional support, enhancing digital capabilities, and promotin cultural awareness among younger generations to ensure the long-term sustainability of traditional culinary heritage.

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