

Local perception of traditional foods in Wonosobo Traditional Markets, Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract. Hanum AF, Azzahra Y, Nursafithri ZA, Dores SD, Natasya AM, Iskandar J, Saensouk S, Setyawan AD. 2025. Local perception of traditional foods in Wonosobo Traditional Markets, Central Java, Indonesia. *Asian J Ethnobiol* 8: 49-55. Traditional markets are an important part of Indonesian culture due to their capacity to negotiate prices and provide affordable, everyday essentials as well as distinctive gastronomic experiences. Wonosobo has a rich culinary heritage that promotes both local culture and tourism, and it is well-known for its variety of traditional delicacies. This study aims to understand the Wonosobo people's perceptions of traditional food and its comparison with modernized food. This study focuses on the Kertek and Wonosobo Main Markets in Wonosobo District, Central Java, to investigate consumer preferences and perceptions of traditional food. In October 2024, 90 respondents, 46 women and 44 men, were interviewed as part of the data-gathering process. Results show that 68.4% of respondents strongly prefer traditional foods, valuing them for their health benefits and cultural significance. A smaller percentage (3.8%) noted that modernized food availability impacts traditional food choices. Younger respondents tended to modern food, highlighting a generational shift. This suggests a need for strategies to preserve traditional foods while balancing them with modern culinary trends. The difference in preference for traditional food and modernized food can be influenced by globalization. Therefore, special attention is needed to traditional food so that it remains sustainable. The importance of governmental and local initiatives in promoting and sustaining traditional foods has to meet evolving consumer preferences, ensuring their relevance in a modernizing food landscape.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, food preference, local perceptions, traditional food, Wonosobo District

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country known for its traditional markets. Indonesian people tend to negotiate when shopping. Traditional markets play a significant role in socioeconomic, environmental, political, and administrative aspects at both local and regional levels (Dominique-Ferreira et al. 2021). These characteristics make traditional markets the main choice. One of the advantages of traditional markets is affordable prices, so they are cheaper for the community, in accordance with market functions in general. The use of traditional markets as shopping locations highlights the importance of research regarding market convenience (Klara 2023). Indonesian culinary heritage encompasses a variety of snacks commonly found as part of traditional cuisine (Nurhayati et al. 2014). Traditional foods have been utilized as a means to promote regional economic growth and are key components in communicating culture (Florek and Gazda 2021). Interest in traditional foods remains strong because they serve as the basis for nutrition across various cultures and societies (Aquino et al. 2021). Traditional foods are formed through an evolutionary process that involves

the adaptation between the foods consumed and the various types of available ingredients, as well as the activities carried out by local communities (Mulyani et al. 2020). It's generally derived from nutrient-rich plants, playing a vital role in supporting ethnobotany. Unfortunately, many traditional foods are now at risk of extinction (Purba et al. 2018). According to Iskandar et al. (2023), there is a close relationship between biodiversity and cultural heritage related to the food sector. Culture cannot be viewed as a fixed material reality; rather, in the context of economic globalization, culture creates a reality that is continuously produced and reproduced, which in turn gives rise to new identities (Irianto 2016). Rapid developments in global trade, ethnic mobility, and the tourism sector have influenced the acceptance and understanding of traditional cuisine (Romulo and Surya 2021).

Wonosobo, a District in Central Java, is renowned not only for the stunning natural beauty of the Dieng mountains but also for its diverse array of traditional culinary offerings. Due to its strategic geographical location, Indonesia enjoys a significant advantage as a producer of various types of food sources and traditional dishes (Lestari and Christina

2018). The variety of food options available should receive greater attention from the government, especially considering the recent trend of culinary tourism gaining popularity (Harsana et al. 2022). The abundance of culinary recommendations in a particular region has demonstrated this fact, as they are promoted through various media and travel guides that typically showcase the region's distinctive culinary attractions to tourists (Kurniawan and Hanjani 2023).

One of them is Wonosobo Market. Wonosobo has several markets, two of which are the Kertek Market and the Wonosobo Main Market. Wonosobo Market is one of the large markets in Wonosobo District, Central Java Province. Kertek Market is one of the traditional markets in Wonosobo District. Located in Kertek District, this market is famous for its various agricultural products. However, the drawback is that circulation in this market does not appear to be well planned, resulting in conditions in the market being less well organized (Hermawan 2022). Kertek Market has become a shopping center for local residents, which offers various basic necessities, such as rice from Wonosobo District, flour, sugar, salt, vegetables, onions, chilies, fish, chicken, and others. At the Kertek Market, sellers and buyers can negotiate to reach a mutually beneficial price agreement. Merchants also often provide discounts, promotions, or discounts to their customers. On the other hand, Wonosobo Main Market is the largest market in Wonosobo District (Miftah et al. 2023).

Understanding changes in community mindsets and perspectives is essential for developing appropriate steps (Afif et al. 2023). Observations and theoretical hypotheses should guide this process. Interviews provide insight into people's or groups experiences, opinions, and motives around specific topics (Islam 2022). These interviews aid in forecasting potential solutions and offer profound insights into social processes (Edwards and Holland 2020). This study aims to (i) understand the perspectives of Wonosobo District residents on traditional foods; (ii) determine the frequency of traditional food consumption; and (iii) clarify public preferences between traditional and modern foods. The research focuses on patterns, processes,

and mechanisms, with age, education, social environment, and rural development policies shaping food preferences (Turner et al. 2023).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The entire area of Wonosobo District, Central Java Province, Indonesia, is a plateau with an altitude of 744 m above sea level. Wonosobo District is located between 7° 21.793'S 109° 54.011'E (Muafani 2017). This research was conducted in two traditional markets, Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market (Figure 1). The selection of this research area is based on recommendations from several speakers regarding the community's views on traditional foods. This research will be carried out in October 2024. Kertek Market is located in Kertek District. This market is a market located in a mountainous area, precisely on the slopes of Mount Sindoro and flanked by Mount Sindoro and Mount Sumbing. The Wonosobo Main Market is located in the Wonosobo Sub-district. This market is the center of the local economy in Wonosobo District. This market is located in the center of Wonosobo City, so it is very easy to find and reach the public.

Procedures

This study employs a qualitative research method based on a post-positive approach, where the researcher acts as the instrument. This approach acknowledges that local perception cannot be fully explained objectively, requiring the researcher to interpret data with an awareness of social context and potential subjectivity. We collected interview data in a semi-structured manner, asking respondents with previously formulated questions to gauge their reactions to certain issues. This method allows respondents to answer freely based on their understanding while maintaining an open and flexible approach. Our study is highly adaptive, capturing quick responses to the issues being explored. We used interview points referenced from the research of Peulic et al. (2023).

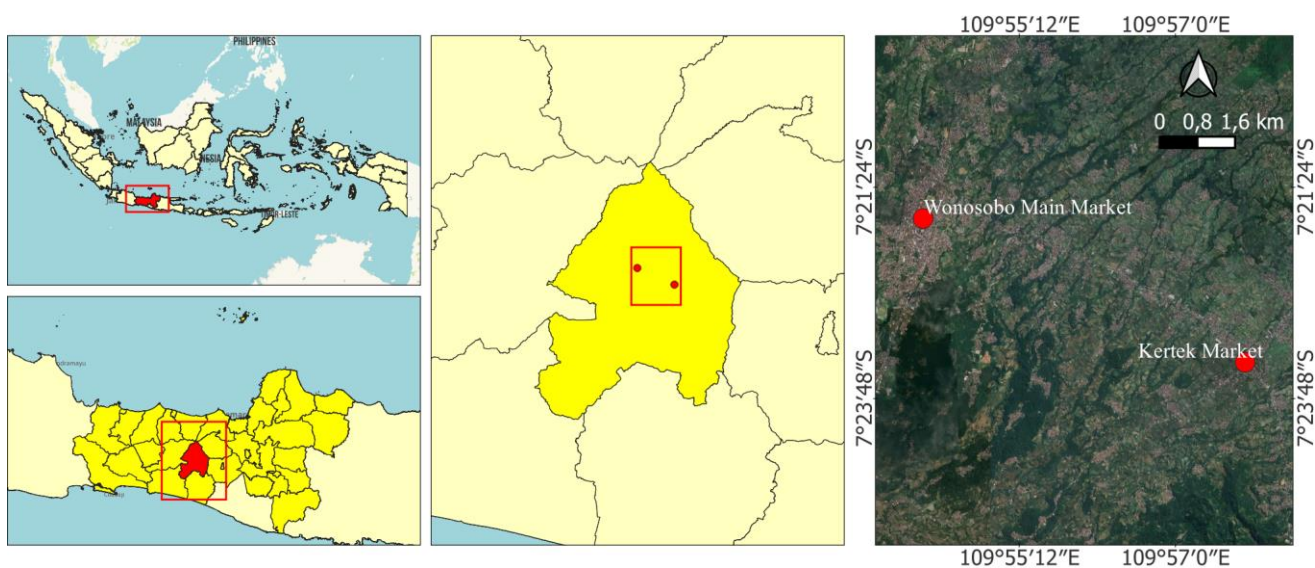


Figure 1. Map of the study area in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market in Wonosobo District, Central Java, Indonesia

In our study, we obtained responses from 90 people of Javanese ethnicity across two markets in Wonosobo: Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market. Overall, there were 46 women and 44 men. At Wonosobo Main Market, 53 respondents participated, with a significantly higher number of men (33 respondents) compared to women (20 respondents). In contrast, Kertek Market had 37 respondents, showing a more balanced proportion of 26 women and 11 men respondents.

Data analysis

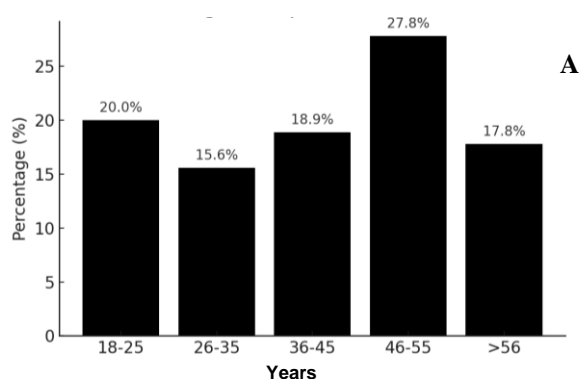
Data processing was conducted using a qualitative descriptive analysis method, where data obtained from the interviews were classified based on the categories of questions and answers. Microsoft Excel was employed as a supporting tool to organize and quantify the categorized data. These results were then converted into numerical form and visualized through graphs to facilitate the identification of patterns. Although Excel was used for quantification and visualization, the analysis remained descriptive and interpretative in nature. Descriptive analysis was used to provide comprehensive interpretation using scientific article references as an additional form of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic characteristics in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

The majority of participants in this survey were female, accounting for 51.1% of the total respondents, while males comprised only 48.9% (Figure 2). This indicates a predominance of female respondents. Nearly all respondents were native residents of Wonosobo, with only about 2% from outside the area, indicating strong local community involvement.

The age range of respondents reveals significant variation. People with an age range of 46-55 years have the largest percentage, which is 27.8%. People with an age range of 26-35 years have a smaller percentage, which is 15.6%. These demographics provide a comprehensive perspective, revealing that the survey encompasses various life stages and community segments, which is crucial for understanding local perceptions of traditional food in Wonosobo.



Frequency of traditional food consumption in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents, 60%, consume traditional food daily. This shows that traditional food consumption is still very high in the daily lives of the Wonosobo people. Apart from that, 18.9% of respondents consume traditional food weekly. Although not as often as the group who consumes it every day, they still consume traditional foods quite regularly.

On the other hand, 4.4% of people only consume traditional food once a month. This rare frequency can be caused by busyness or other priorities in daily life. This weekly and monthly consumption is due to demands for a more hygienic lifestyle, where people prefer to cook for themselves at home rather than buy it at traditional markets. Despite this, they still maintain traditions by consuming traditional foods regularly, although not as often as other groups. There are also people with a percentage of 16.7% who only eat traditional food very rarely. This is caused by preferences that tend towards modern food or lifestyle demands that do not support the consumption of traditional food. Nevertheless, they still have the awareness to maintain traditions, even in a small portion. Overall, the graph shows that consumption of traditional food is still quite high among respondents, which is a promising sign for the future of traditional food culture. However, there are significant differences in frequency between groups who consume it daily, weekly, monthly, and rarely.

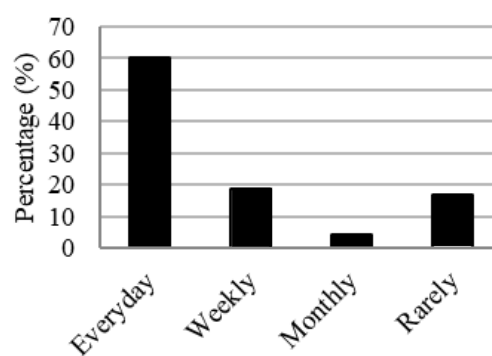


Figure 3. Frequency of traditional food consumption

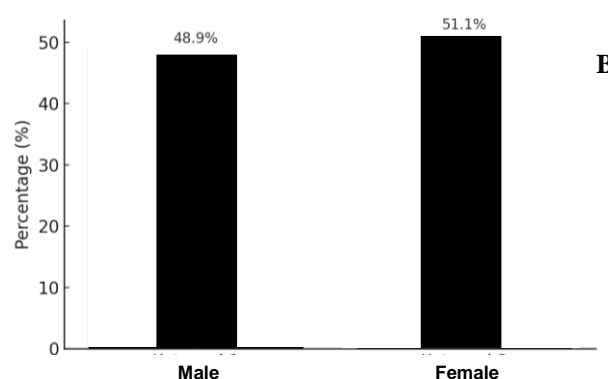


Figure 2. Demographic characteristics: A. Age; B. Gender

Local views of the significance of traditional food in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

Figure 4 revealed that 62% of respondents identify traditional food as food that is specific or unique to a certain area. Then, 23% of respondents believe that traditional production methods influence the definition of traditional food. A percentage of 11% of the community also states that traditional food does not use any additives or is free from chemicals. Only a small portion of the community (3%) defines traditional food as produce from the agricultural sector.

The availability of traditional food at the Wonosobo Main Market and Kertek Market based on the results of interviews, it was found that a lot of traditional food is sold in both markets for various reasons. Firstly, traditional food has a special place in the hearts of the local people, where traditional markets are often visited by people looking for authentic flavors that are difficult to find elsewhere, so the demand remains high. In addition, the availability of local raw materials around traditional markets, such as vegetables, fruits, spices, and other products, makes it easier for traders to get raw materials at more affordable prices and good quality. Cultural factors and customs also come into play, as traditional foods are often associated with local traditions, and traditional markets are a great place to sell food rooted in local customs and traditions. Affordable prices in traditional markets are also the reason, as lower operational costs make the products sold, including traditional foods, more accessible to different walks of life. Local wisdom also supports this, where traders are often direct producers or have close relationships with producers, and they may follow family recipes or traditional processing methods that have been passed down from generation to generation so that the food sold is more authentic. The social environment in traditional markets that supports interaction between sellers and buyers is crucial. It allows for direct communication about consumer preferences, helping merchants understand local tastes and tailor the products sold. This emphasis on social interactions makes consumers feel understood and catered to, enhancing their experience in traditional markets.

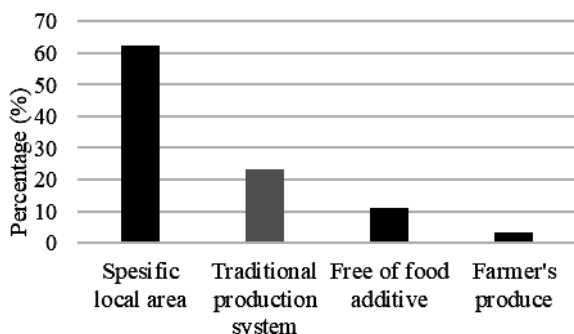


Figure 4. Definition of traditional food based on the community at Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market, Wonosobo District, Central Java Province, Indonesia

Local perceptions regarding characteristics of traditional food in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

As many as 66% of respondents strongly agreed with the existence of traditional food in both markets, namely Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market (Figure 5). This reflects the high enthusiasm of the community towards traditional food. The quality of traditional food also received a good response, with a percentage of 60% of respondents strongly agreed that the quality of traditional food in both markets is satisfactory and 36% of respondents agreed that the quality of traditional food in both markets is satisfactory. This suggests that the majority of the community perceives the quality of traditional food in both markets as quite good. The qualities in question are food hygiene and environmental friendliness. People pay attention to specific characteristics of traditional foods, with the aspect "GMO-free" being the most important at 50%. Responses also highlighted the importance of foods that are "free of chemical additives" and "organic products." The organic products referred to are food ingredients that are not mixed with pesticides and other ingredients, while being free from chemicals, the criteria for these foods is that they are not mixed with preservatives and other additives like modernized foods.

The percentage of respondents who disagree with the response that traditional food is healthier than modern food is small, 5-10% disagree. However, the assumption that modernized food will affect traditional food in the Traditional Market showed the largest value, which was 31%. Local people think that even with the presence of modernized food, they will prefer traditional food because it has become an everyday food and still has a strong appeal to the community. The majority of respondents who disagree with traditional food are minors or teenagers. This shows that although traditional food has high cultural and health value, the increasing influence of modern food also changes people's perceptions in choosing types of food.

Preference local towards traditional food with modernized food in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

Figure 6 reveals how people in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market prefer traditional food to modern food. People with a percentage of 72% strongly agree that they prefer traditional food to modern food. 70% of people strongly agree that traditional food is healthier than modern food and the availability of modern food can affect the existence of traditional food in Traditional Markets with a percentage of 49% strongly agreeing regarding this. Meanwhile, 20-21% agree that people prefer traditional food to modern food, consider traditional food to be healthier than modern food, and the existence of modern food can affect the availability of traditional food.

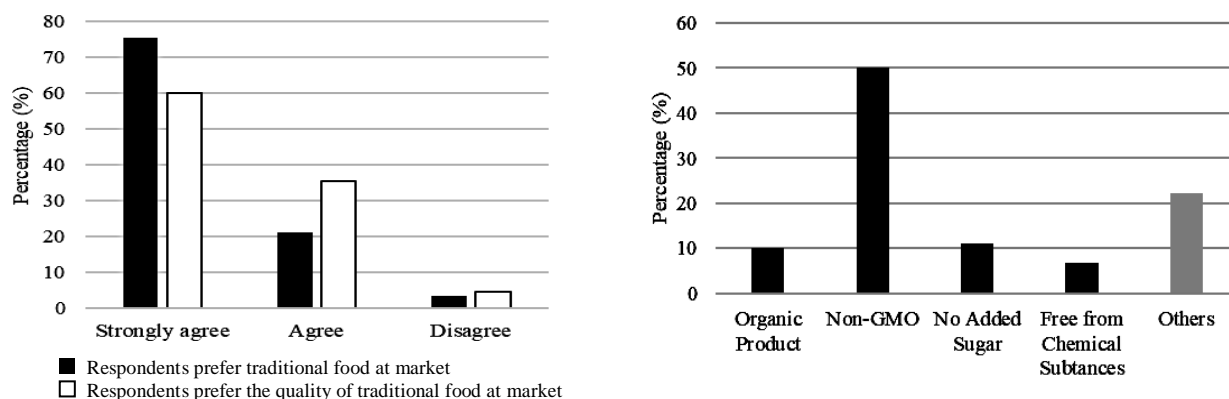


Figure 5. Perceptions of the community regarding traditional food at Wonosobo Traditional Markets, Wonosobo District, Central Java Province, Indonesia

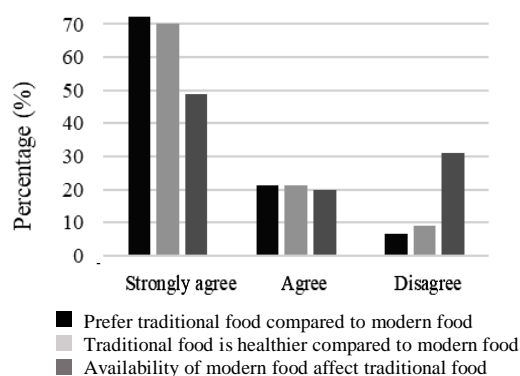


Figure 6. Community preference towards traditional food with modernized food

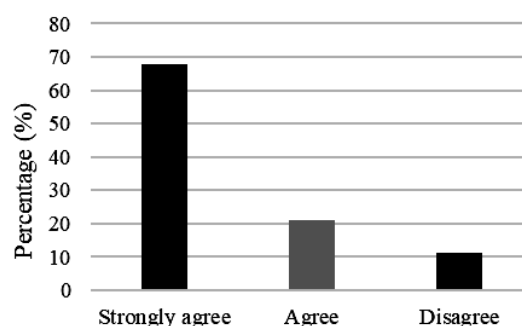


Figure 7. Community preferences on the importance of preserving traditional foods

Local perceptions towards how important traditional food in Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market

Based on the findings regarding public perceptions of traditional foods in both Kertek Market and Wonosobo Main Market, the availability of these foods is considered important to preserve (Figure 7). The public recommends a number of actions to increase the visibility of traditional foods, such as increasing online sales and using social media to promote them. The rise of food media and internet platforms has greatly impacted consumer preferences and the dissemination of traditional food. Similar to the research of Rajan (2023), technology's role in traditional food is continually reshaping our perceptions and experiences of the cuisine of traditional food. Additionally, innovations in flavor and packaging that align with current trends are viewed as effective ways to increase young people's interest in consuming traditional foods. In Indonesia, for instance, some innovative packaging for traditional foods has been successfully conducted, and the products are successfully marketed, such as 'hygienic tempe' as the innovative product of traditional tempe, 'canned gudeg' as the innovative product of 'gudeg besek', 'sambal in a jar' as the innovative product of 'homemade sambal', and 'powdered coconut milk' as the innovative product of fresh coconut milk (Fibri and Frost 2019). In developed countries, traditional food products have been developed. In Western

countries, traditional food products are standardized by Geographical Indication (GI). Many of these products are registered as Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, or Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, and they can be produced on a small to large industrial scale (Fibri et al. 2022).

Discussion

Demographically, this research is dominated by women respondents of various ages. The availability of information regarding demographic data can show each individual's views regarding traditional food at The Wonosobo Traditional Market. Things that can influence local consumption patterns are eating patterns and the availability of food ingredients as external factors, as well as internal factors such as age, academics, work, lifestyle, and personality (Khairullah et al. 2020). The results show that the frequency of locals consuming traditional food is every day, followed by the smallest frequency of consuming traditional food every month. The reason why the consumption of traditional food is still high among respondents can be caused by several factors, including the fact that traditional food is part of the cultural heritage that has become part of the lifestyle of the Wonosobo people. Consuming traditional food can be an identity and a way to preserve traditions. People tend to like the taste and texture

of traditional food that is familiar and suits their tastes. The ingredients used in traditional food are generally readily available in the local environment, making it convenient for people to consume them. People may think that traditional food, with its rich flavors and superior nutritional content, is of higher quality compared to modern food. The research of Moscatelli et al. (2017) stated that high interest in food is not only assessed based on health but also on cultural and economic factors.

The Wonosobo community sees that the related traditional food is the specific food in the local area or special area. The research of Zrnic et al. (2021) shows that traditional food is best defined as dishes or foods that are passed down from one generation to the next. In almost all countries, this practice preserves the traditional food heritage, an inseparable part of each nation's unique culture. Traditional food often reflects the cultural heritage and identity of a region. For example, traditional foods characteristic of the Wonosobo area includes *tempe kemul*, *mie ongklok*, *gethuk*, *sagon*, *cenil*, *nasi megono*, *geblek*, *carica*, *dendeng gepuk*, and others. *Tempe kemul* is one of the most frequently served foods because it is an everyday food for the local people of Wonosobo. Many people associate traditional food with being healthier due to its natural ingredients and preparation methods. This belief is supported by the view that traditional foods are less processed and contain fewer additives.

The study showed that most of the local people of Wonosobo tend to pay more attention to the existence of traditional food and the quality of traditional food. Local people consider traditional food to be better because it contains non-GMO. In addition, people also highlighted that the food has no added sugar, including organic products, and is free from chemicals. The products are of high quality due to the use of traditional food and often environmentally friendly raw materials (Feldmann and Hamm 2015). Similar to the research of Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. (2022), the criteria for good quality traditional food can be seen from the freshness of the product, hygiene, and health benefits. In the study by Peulic et al. (2023), the population of Vojvodina tended to have the perception that traditional food is free from added sugar. This is related to public health policies that recommend providing sugar intake due to associated risks such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Balletti et al. 2017). Meanwhile, in the research of Hartmann et al. (2019), it is explained that Serbian consumers consider the presence of GMOs in products as one of the most important factors in their purchasing decisions, according to their report on European consumers perceptions and assessments of the European Union food quality scheme. Local perceptions of GMO-free traditional foods are also related to health. It is claimed that Genetically Modified (GM) crops can lead to antibiotic resistance, the presence of harmful toxins, fungi, toxic metals, and increased cancer risks in humans. Additionally, these crops are said to reduce the nutritional value of food and introduce new allergens and other potential hazards (Ekici and Sancak 2020). This shows that respondents are looking for traditional foods that are free from additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients.

Globalization significantly influences food preferences among youth, driven by factors such as fashion, social imitation, and technological advances. It standardizes consumption patterns, fostering a global consumer culture with shared values and attitudes toward brands and products (Hanus 2018). In line with this, interview data from the present study indicated that teenage respondents showed a stronger inclination toward modern food options compared to older age groups. However, globalization can also help local products become internationally recognized. Social media can play an important role, although on the one hand it can encourage the younger generation to tend to choose modern food, but on the other hand traditional food can be recognized by the international community. Social media helps food marketers reach young consumers, especially teenagers, who are easily influenced and not as skeptical about advertising as adults. This makes it easier for them to be swayed by social media marketing (Qutteina et al. 2019). Globalization can open up opportunities for local products to international markets, such as local products made to suit geographical and seasonal conditions so that they can provide a unique impression for tourists. In addition, local culinary festivals introduced to the global market can also strengthen the local identity of the product (Mak et al. 2012). Furthermore, globalization of consumption leads to consumer ethnocentrism, where buyers show a preference for locally made products (Angowski and Lipowski 2014). Therefore, many activities are needed to preserve traditional foods, and maintaining a balance between traditional food sustainability and modern culinary innovation can be an important strategy to meet the preferences of diverse consumers. However, it is important to understand that the modernization of traditional foods and the increase in their production pose serious risks to the preservation of the rich and diverse cultural heritage that accompanies them. The local community also believes that government support is essential for preservation initiatives, such as organizing events that can attract interest or providing special stalls. Furthermore, improving hygiene in the production process is deemed important to ensure that people feel safe and comfortable consuming traditional foods.

In conclusion, local community in Wonosobo have a strong preference for traditional food, which remains a part of their daily consumption and cultural identity. Traditional foods are perceived as healthier, more natural, and free from additives compared to modern alternatives. These findings highlight the urgent need for strategic efforts, especially from local governments and communities to preserve and promote traditional foods in ways that appeal to evolving consumer preferences, particularly among youth.

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