

THE GEN Z's PREFERENCES IN CONSUMING TRADITIONAL FOOD

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Abstract

Traditional food plays a vital role in supporting agriculture and strengthening local industries, yet globalization and lifestyle changes have shifted consumer preferences. This study analyzes Gen-Z's attitudes toward traditional food in Padang City, West Sumatra, a well-known culinary tourism destination. Using a qualitative approach, 185 Gen-Z consumers were interviewed through non-probability accidental sampling. Results indicate that 54.6% of respondents know how to prepare traditional food, with knowledge largely inherited from parents or family (70.5%). Consumption occurs several times a week (53.5%), most often with family (53.5%) and during cultural ceremonies (25.2%). Purchases are primarily made at food stalls or canteens (68.1%) and outlets (25.4%), rather than cafés or restaurants. Digital platforms are widely used for purchasing (59.4%), with Shopee (39.5%) and Go-Food (26.9%) being the most popular. The main reasons for consumption are authentic taste (50.8%) and affordable price (38.9%). Gen-Z expresses pride in consuming traditional food (52.9%) and a strong willingness to promote it (84.6%), though they also show a considerable tendency toward fast food (52.9%). Future efforts should emphasize food parenting, packaging innovation, and digital marketing to attract Gen-Z preferences and ensure the preservation of traditional culinary heritage.

Keyword : Consumer preference, Gen-Z, culinary industry, Minangkabau traditional food, life style

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and lifestyle changes have significantly impacted society, including food consumption patterns. Young people represent a consumer group highly vulnerable to shifts in preferences due to their curiosity and desire to explore new experiences. The growing popularity of fast food, such as Korean and Japanese cuisine, is suspected to challenge the existence of traditional food among younger generations. Nevertheless, the preservation of traditional food is essential, as it supports agriculture and local industries while promoting a sustainable economic system.

The food processing industry plays a crucial role in creating higher value added from primary commodities/agricultural products (Fitriana & Febrina, 2023). In addition, the food processing industry contributes significantly to economic growth and employment absorption (Fitriana, 2020). The growth of the food industry in Indonesia reached 6.0 percent in 2025; however, further improvement is required through the strengthening of financial inclusion (Fitriana et al., 2019b) and the innovation of marketing strategies (Handra et al., 2023).

The development of technology and globalization has also influenced the growth of the food industry. Advances in digital technology have driven changes in consumer behavior and lifestyle, particularly in purchasing food products online (Fitriana et al., 2021). Globalization has further intensified competition in the food sector with the entry of products from other countries, thereby shifting consumer preferences away from traditional food.

West Sumatra is widely recognized as a region with a rich diversity of distinctive culinary product. It is also renowned as a paradise for the culinary industry in Indonesia. In 2016, West Sumatra was awarded the title of World's Best Halal Culinary Destination. The richness of the food industry in West Sumatra is supported by traditional food industries that produce a variety of local specialty products. Traditional food industries are generally operated

using simple, inherited technologies and are deeply embedded with local philosophical and cultural values (Fitriana et al., 2019a).

West Sumatra offers a wide variety of traditional foods that can be consumed as snacks or purchased as distinctive local souvenirs. Traditional food represents regional specialties prepared with unique flavors, inherited recipes, and locally sourced ingredients (Putra et al., 2023). It also constitutes an integral part of local culture, philosophy, and spirituality (Guiné et al., 2021). Moreover, traditional food practices play an important role in the development of the circular economy, particularly in rural areas (Petrescu-Mag et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the existence of traditional food is increasingly challenged by the influx of foreign cuisines that are popular among society, offering practicality and modern appeal aligned with the lifestyle of younger generations. Studies from several countries have shown that lifestyle changes significantly affect the tendency to consume traditional food (Nikolić et al., 2014). In addition, the sustainability of traditional food is also influenced by the growth of tourism and technological advancements (Niedbala et al., 2020). Therefore, examining consumer preferences toward traditional food is crucial to understanding the extent to which Gen-Z can maintain its existence amid global lifestyle transformations.

Research on traditional food industry from the demand side has revealed several challenges, including changes in modern and hectic lifestyles (Abdullah & Nor Azam, 2021), advances in technology and digital marketing (Fitriana et al., 2021), market modernization and globalization with the influx of foreign food products (Wachyuni et al., 2023), as well as limited market reach (Abas et al., 2023). From the consumer perspective, shifts in consumption preferences toward traditional food are influenced by regional characteristics. In urban areas, the preference for fast food consumption is higher compared to rural regions, particularly in Java and Bali (Briawan et al., 2022). In addition, consumer preferences are strongly shaped by the influence of social media (Putra et al., 2023), economic factors (Ernawati & Prakoso, 2020), and social factors (Salsabila & Hana, 2023).

This study contributes by providing empirical evidence on consumer preferences toward traditional food, particularly among Gen-Z. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for traditional food SMEs producers in developing and innovating their businesses in the future, as well as serve as considerations for local governments in supporting the development of SMEs, especially those engaged in traditional food production

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Padang City. The location was deliberately chosen using the purposive sampling method because Padang has the largest population in West Sumatra, accounting for 16.32 percent (2025). In addition, Padang also records the highest growth of SMEs. According to the central statistical data, the growth of SMEs continuously increased during 2021–2024. In 2023, there were 9,989 small-scale industrial units in Padang City most of which operated in the food and beverage sector. This study focuses specifically on the traditional food industry.

The research variables observed to measure consumer preferences are as follows: (1) types of traditional food consumed, (2) frequency of consumption, (3) reasons for consumption, (4) preference for innovation, (5) preference for price and accessibility, (6) preference for place/location of consumption, (7) cultural pride, (8) willingness to promote, (9) availability of digital platforms, and (10) lifestyle compatibility.

This study employed a non-probability sampling method using accidental sampling techniques. The number of 185 respondents was established using quota sampling to ensure representation of young people born between 1997 and 2012 (Gen-Z). The selection of Gen-Z

was based on the consideration that Indonesia's population structure is dominated by this cohort, accounting for 27.94 percent.

Data collection was conducted through surveys using interview techniques with consumers and MSME actors, as well as field observations in traditional markets, culinary centers, and cultural events. Data analysis was carried out in the following stages: (1) data entry and cleaning, (2) descriptive analysis: presenting frequencies and percentages for each observed variable, (3) data visualization: using bar charts or histograms, and (4) qualitative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Minangkabau traditional food is renowned for its authentic taste and rich use of spices, distinctive cooking techniques and seasonings, as well as its important role as a cultural identity, particularly in traditional ceremonies and in strengthening the local economy. West Sumatra offers a wide variety of traditional foods, some of which have gained international recognition, such as rendang and sate.

Gen-Z represents one of the potential consumer groups for traditional food. Based on population structure, Gen-Z accounts for approximately 27%–28% of the national population. This condition reflects the strategic potential of Gen-Z in strengthening the existence of traditional food. Information on Gen Z's preferences toward traditional food consumption is expected to bridge cultural values with contemporary lifestyles. Beyond being active consumers, Gen-Z is also expected to serve as innovators in the culinary industry and promoters of traditional food through digital media.

Respondent Characteristics

The results of interviews with 185 Gen-Z consumers show that 69% of respondents were female. A study conducted in the United Arab Emirates revealed that 46% of women consume traditional food one to two times per week, while 32.5% of men consume it three to four times per week. Both genders identified taste as the primary reason for this choice (Al Dhaheri et al., 2014). Gen-Z consumers of Minangkabau traditional food are not only from the Minang ethnic (74.5%) but also from outside the Minang ethnic (25.5%). Minangkabau traditional food is widely recognized for its national popularity, making it highly consumed by other ethnic across Indonesia and even internationally. Moreover, Minangkabau culinary traditions have become one of the main tourist attractions in West Sumatra.

Gender	Ethnic	Hometown	Living
female, 69%	Minangkabau, 75%		with family, 63%
male, 31%	Other, 26%	West Sumatera, 96%	alone, 37%

Figure 1. Respondent Characteristics

Gen-Z consumers who are not of Minang ethnicity stated that Minangkabau traditional cuisine has a distinctive taste that is easily accepted by the younger generation. Minangkabau traditional food is enjoyed across regions and has become a leading culinary heritage of Indonesia. A study involving 120 respondents at Padang restaurants also confirmed that

Minangkabau traditional food is widely accepted by national consumers due to its unique and authentic flavor, making it one of the cultural identities of the nation (Arsil et al., 2021).

Gen-Z who migrate and live far from their parents and families tend to seek traditional food as an emotional bond, a source of nostalgia, and a reminder of home and family. Consuming traditional food helps alleviate feelings of homesickness, even though they remain open to modern cuisine. Similarly, a study on traditional food in Oman found that emotional value significantly influences customer attitudes toward traditional food (Soliman et al., 2025).

Female consumers tend to have stronger emotional motivations in food consumption. The findings of this study indicate that 69% of respondents purchasing traditional food were women. For them, consuming traditional food provides a sense of comfort and happiness, similar to the feeling of being with family. Research on food behavior has shown that male consumers are generally oriented toward practical challenges, whereas female consumers are more driven by emotional challenges in food consumption (Andersen, 2021).

Gen-Z consumer preferences

Gen-Z's preferences in consuming traditional food were measured using ten indicators, namely: (1) types of traditional food consumed, (2) frequency of consumption, (3) reasons for consumption, (4) preference for innovation, (5) preference for price (6) preference for place/location of consumption, (7) cultural pride, (8) willingness to promote, (9) availability of digital platforms, and (10) lifestyle compatibility.

Types of traditional food consumed

The research findings indicate that the traditional foods most frequently consumed by Gen-Z are staple dishes such as rendang, dendeng, sate, and others (52.3%), alongside snacks such as chips or peyek (32.4%). Rendang emerges as the most widely consumed traditional food among Gen-Z. Its distinctive flavor has gained global recognition and has become a symbol of Minangkabau identity and culture. In fact, CNN once named rendang one of the world's most delicious foods (Rahman, 2020).

Philosophically, rendang represents patience, cooperation, and perseverance (Nurmufida et al., 2017), as its cooking process requires 4–8 hours of slow simmering over low heat while continuously stirring until the spices are fully absorbed. Rendang is also closely associated with the Minangkabau tradition of migration (merantau), a defining characteristic of the Minang people (Darmayanti et al., 2017). It serves as a provision for Minang individuals who migrate, as it is long-lasting without preservatives, symbolizing resilience and adaptability during their journeys. Gen-Z who live far from their parents are often provided with rendang by their families.

Frequency of consumption

The frequency of traditional food consumption among Gen-Z in Padang City is relatively high, with 53.51% consuming it several times a week. Gen-Z tends to consume traditional food frequently due to its quality and taste, affordable price, and easy accessibility. Although Gen-Z acknowledges that the flavor of traditional food is irreplaceable by modern cuisine.

Global lifestyle trends also influence their daily consumption behavior. In Padang, only 15.41% of Gen-Z reported rarely consuming traditional food. Research conducted in other regions, however, shows contrasting results: in Yogyakarta, 66.7% of adolescents prefer modern food over traditional food (Galuh Putri Hardikna Sempati & L, 2017), whereas in Medan, most adolescents favor traditional food over modern alternatives and continue to enjoy its distinctive taste (Siregar, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the tendency of society to consume traditional food is relatively low, accounting for only 9.3 percent of the total population. The frequency of consumption occurs only on specific occasions rather than on a daily basis. At the individual level, the main factor contributing to the low consumption of traditional food is the inconvenience in accessing and preparing it (33.2%). At the community and national levels, the

most significant barrier is location and residence (31.8%) (Chopera et al., 2022). In Canada, family and community influence plays a major role in the frequency of traditional food consumption (Hanemaayer et al., 2020). Lifestyle changes also have a substantial impact on the frequency of traditional food consumption (Monterrosa et al., 2020).

Reasons for consumption

The reasons Gen-Z in Padang City consume traditional food are its distinctive taste (50.8%) and affordable price (38.9%). Several related studies indicate that traditional food is rich in spices, possesses authentic flavors (Balogh et al., 2016), and cannot be replaced by modern food. Traditional food also contributes to the health and well-being of local communities (Hanemaayer et al., 2020). A study among adolescents in the United Arab Emirates revealed that 69% of males and 47% of females consider traditional food to be healthier (Al Dhaheri et al., 2014).

In addition to enjoying traditional food for its delicious and authentic taste, 68.1% of Gen-Z in Padang City also possess knowledge of the preparation process of traditional food. This knowledge is primarily acquired from parents and family (70.45%) and, to a lesser extent, from media sources (18.75%). This study emphasizes that food literacy plays a crucial role in shaping Gen-Z's preferences for consuming traditional food. In Vojvodina, Serbia, 95.2% of adolescents decided to purchase traditional food products based on their quality, with the most prioritized characteristics being products without added sugar (41.2%) and traditional production processes (38.8%) (Peulić et al., 2023).

Price is also one of the reasons Gen-Z consumes traditional food (38.9%). The price of traditional food tends to be more affordable compared to modern fast food. Research conducted in Garut further shows that price has a positive and significant influence on young people's preference for traditional food, alongside taste and promotion, whereas income and education do not have a significant effect (Grahadita et al., 2022).

Preference for innovation

Preferences for innovation are expected to focus on packaging innovation and marketing innovation through various digital platforms. A total of 48.10% of respondents stated that the packaging of traditional food is simpler compared to modern food. In addition, promotion through digital platforms remains limited. As many as 32.97% of respondents reported never making purchases digitally, while only 7.57% frequently purchased through social media. The digital platforms most frequently used by respondents were Shopee (46.5%), GoFood (27.5%), and TikTok Shop (19.32%).

Gen-Z is highly influenced by social media and digital trends. Innovative promotion of traditional food through platforms such as Shopee, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram can increase the interest of young consumers. Moreover, traditional food that is repackaged with modern innovations (attractive packaging and digital marketing) is more likely to be accepted by Gen-Z (Briawan et al., 2022). A study in China found that digital technology is more effective in driving the internationalization of traditional food. Digital marketing applications can also expand market reach in the food business (Fitriana et al., 2021).

Preference for price

Gen-Z perceives traditional food as affordable in relation to the quality of the product offered and the purchasing power of society. Gen-Z tends to be more rational in assessing price affordability and the benefits of the food they consume. As most Gen-Z individuals are students with limited income, affordable pricing becomes an important determinant. A study conducted in North Sumatra confirmed that price has a significant influence on the purchase of traditional food (Ritonga, 2019).

Preference for place/location of consumption

The preferred places or settings for consuming traditional food are most often at home, enjoyed with family, or during traditional ceremonies. In Padang City, Gen-Z consumes traditional food more frequently when together with family (53.5%) and during customary events (25.2%). The warmth of family gatherings is further enhanced by sharing traditional food. In West Sumatra, the existence of traditional food is inseparable from traditions and ceremonial practices. Certain traditional foods, such as *rendang*, serve as symbols of respect for customary leaders in attendance.

In several other countries, as many as 98.3% of people in Serbia tend to consume traditional food at home with their families (Peulić et al., 2023). In Italy (Vesci & Botti, 2019) and Korea (Sohn et al., 2014), culinary festivals and cultural events serve as important occasions to strengthen tourism and introduce traditional food to younger generations.

Regionally, research in Indonesia shows that adolescents in urban areas of Java and Bali tend to consume more fast food compared to traditional food. Conversely, regions outside Java and Bali as well as rural areas are more inclined toward traditional food due to factors of availability, affordability, and family habits (Briawan et al., 2022). This indicates that in areas with strong culinary traditions, traditional food is more resilient compared to large urban centers.

Gen-Z also reported difficulties in finding traditional food in cafés and restaurants. As many as 68.1% of respondents stated that traditional food is more easily available at nearby food stalls, as well as traditional food outlets (25.4%), compared to cafés or restaurants. Studies in several Asian countries indicate that traditional food is more commonly found in small stalls or local vendors. In addition, traditional markets serve as authentic places to access traditional food. However, in several cities in Turkey and Italy, traditional food is presented as culinary tourism in both local and modern restaurants (Memiş & Assoc, 2018).

Cultural pride

The sense of pride in consuming traditional food among Gen-Z is relatively strong, reaching 52.9%. Traditional food is perceived as part of Minangkabau cultural identity that must be preserved and as a historical value that should be maintained. Cultural identity and pride in local food encourage Gen-Z to continue consuming traditional food amidst global influences. Although Gen-Z is more exposed to fast food, they still maintain traditional food consumption when supported by family and reinforced by cultural pride.

In Korea, *kimchi* is regarded as a symbol of national identity and pride. The annual communal *kimchi*-making event is celebrated as a festive tradition in Korea. This practice has even been inscribed as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2013, representing a long-standing tradition and cultural pride deeply embedded in Korean philosophy (Surya & Lee, 2022).

Willingness to promote

As many as 84.6% of Gen-Z in Padang City expressed a desire to promote traditional food to people they know. This action is driven by the strong sense of pride Gen-Z feels in consuming traditional food (52.9%). Promotion is carried out by offering traditional food as gifts to acquaintances, posting culinary content on social media accounts, and participating in local culinary festivals.

Traditional food promotion through social media and digital content is also undertaken by Gen-Z by becoming food influencers, providing reviews, or creating short, engaging videos. The rapid development of digital technology has given rise to the profession of food influencers, who provide food literacy references for society. A study in Hanoi revealed that social media content viewed by student respondents from food influencers influences purchase intentions, consumption behavior, and the willingness to promote traditional food (Tran, 2025).

Availability of digital platforms

Gen-Z's preference for traditional food also reflects their purchasing behavior through digital applications, with 59.45% reporting having made purchases via such platforms. The most frequently used platforms were Shopee (39.5%) and GoFood (26.9%). The availability of digital platforms serves as a bridge between the existence of traditional food and the lifestyle changes of Gen-Z, who tend to favor practicality and modernity.

New trends in many countries show that traditional food has begun to be marketed through food delivery applications and social media. Studies in Indonesia also indicate that Gen-Z living in major cities in Java and Bali are more easily exposed to modern food through digital platforms compared to those in smaller cities in Sumatra and other rural areas (Briawan et al., 2022).

Lifestyle compatibility

Gen-Z in Padang City, West Sumatra, tends to consume outside food and fast food as it reflects the lifestyle of today's youth. However, food literacy acquired since childhood carries memories and emotional values that contribute to their preference for traditional food. A healthy lifestyle further encourages Gen-Z to consume traditional food, as it is rich in nutritional value, spices, and natural ingredients. In contrast, urban lifestyles that prioritize practicality make adolescents more exposed to modern and fast food consumption.

In general, Gen-Z has a strong emotional attachment to traditional food since childhood. Even when they grow up and migrate or live far from their parents and families, embedded culinary culture and food parenting foster a continued sense of pride in traditional food as a marker of regional cultural identity. Spatially, Gen-Z living in urban areas with more advanced information technology infrastructure tend to be more flexible in accessing traditional food through various digital platforms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Gen-Z represents a potential consumer group for traditional food products. Their curiosity and desire to explore various food choices amidst current global issues pose a challenge to the existence of traditional food. Therefore, several strategies can be implemented to strengthen Gen-Z's preference for consuming traditional food, including reinforcing food parenting from an early age, enhancing cultural values and nostalgia, maintaining unique and authentic flavors, ensuring affordability, and introducing innovations in packaging and marketing, particularly through digital platforms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by the Research Grant of the Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Andalas, in accordance with Research Contract Number: 20/SPK/PLK/RKAT Faperta Unand/2025, Fiscal Year 2025.

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