

Traditional Javanese Food in Malaysia: What the Next Generation Knows, Does, and Thinks

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Abstract: This study is intended to analyze the relationship between knowledge, food practice continuity, and the perception of younger generations. Quantitative methods were used in this study, and a self-administered questionnaire was distributed online. The analysis was conducted in both descriptive and inferential. Based on the findings, it is clear that for both results, there is a positive relationship between independent and dependent variables. In conclusion, it proved that there is a relationship between knowledge and continuity of food practices that can influence the perception of young Javanese generations of traditional Javanese foods.

Keywords: Javanese, Traditional food, Food practice, Young generation

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Introduction

In the year 2023, according to estimates provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), there were 33 million people residing in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). The Malay, Chinese, and Indian populations comprised the three largest groups of the country's diverse ethnic population. Additionally, some people of Javanese, Minangkabau, and Bugis ethnicity live in the country. Because of the wide variety of histories, ethnicities, religious beliefs, traditions, gastronomic practices, and other aspects of people's identities that are represented within this country's population, this nation's traditional cuisine appears to be viewed as a symbol of heritage, brand, and culture. Moreover, it is essential to preserve the food traditions of each ethnic group (Sharif *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this study focuses on assessing the traditional Javanese cuisine perception, knowledge, and practices among the younger generation to determine what the next generation knows, does, and thinks about their traditional foods.

Research Problem

Many younger Javanese generations do not know their ancestors, so they do not recognize or have an opinion about the food their ancestors eat. The younger generation's lack of traditional culinary skills has various causes, including declining ethnic populations and technological advancements in the food industry (Misran *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the influence of Western cuisine and culture has replaced traditional food among younger generations, causing traditional food to vanish (Misran *et al.*, 2022) quickly. For the benefit of the next generation, traditional cuisines such as Kapat Glabed, Sega Ponggol, Ungkep, Lemper Pulut Ayam, Bakpia Teflon, Kuih Sagun and others (Atrinawati, 2019; Durai, 2021). cooking techniques and lifestyles must be preserved (Kwik, 2008; Sharif *et al.*, 2013).

Most of the previous studies focus on Malay young generation practices. Preserving traditional food is critically important in any ethnic group, including the Malays. Sharing and transferring traditional food provisioning skills and techniques between generations are effective ways to achieve preservation (Zahari *et al.*, 2013). It is not easy to obtain information on what the younger generation in Malaysia does with traditional Javanese food. Therefore, before any intervention can be made to preserve their food and culture, assessing their knowledge, perception and practices regarding the traditional cuisine at this level is crucial.

Furthermore, the traditional food knowledge that has been passed down would be lost if the younger generations refuse to learn, practice and pass on their traditional ethnic food culture (Md. Sharif *et al.*, 2013). In order to sustain Javanese traditional food and practices, assessing perception, knowledge, and practices among the younger generation is crucial. Knowledge transmission may not have occurred because of the young generation of our grandmother's century and today's young generation, and the gap is growing (Sharif *et al.*, 2015). Younger generations presently have little interest in preparing traditional dishes.

Nowadays, some of the younger generations of Javanese do not know their descendants; because of this, they do not recognize and have a perception of the food. The transmission of knowledge might not have been transmitted because of the young generation of our grandmother's century and today's young generation. The gap is widening (Sharif *et al.*, 2015). Younger generations also do not have an interest in practicing making traditional foods. Ethnic traditional food knowledge that has been passed down will be lost if the younger generations refuse to learn, practice and pass on their ethnic traditional food culture. It is precisely because of the infinite process of social transformation and information technology that the younger generation has gradually abandoned traditional dietary customs (Sharif *et al.*, 2016). Hence, this study assessed the relationship between the younger generation's knowledge, perception, and food practice, particularly for traditional Javanese foods in Malaysia. This is also to find out the sensitivity of the younger generation towards their traditional food.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the relationship between knowledge and the perception of the younger generation on traditional Javanese foods.
- To determine the relationship between the food practices continuity and the perception of the younger generation on traditional Javanese foods.

Research Question

Following the objective, the research question formulated:

RQ1. Is there any relationship between knowledge and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods?

RQ2. Is there any relationship between the food practices continuity and the perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods?

Research Framework

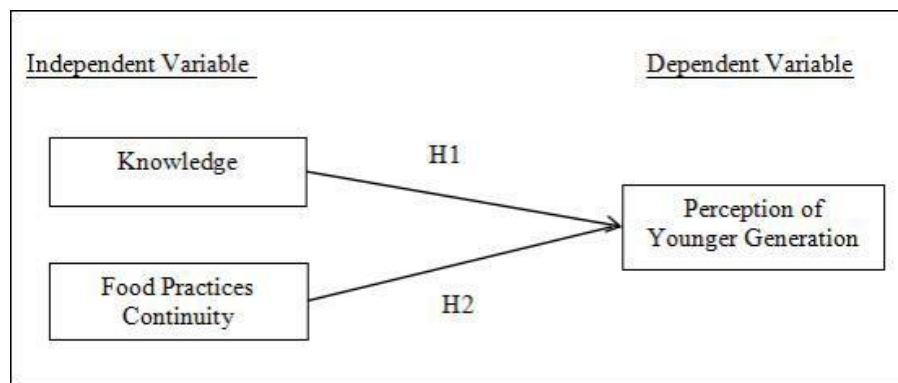


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the perception of the younger generation on traditional Javanese foods

Literature Review

Malay and Javanese

The arrival of the Javanese in Malaysia, which started in the sixteenth century, has indirectly contributed to the formation of Malaysian culture today. The Javanese, while adapting and culturally assimilating to the local community, are also known as a strong community concerning maintaining their customs, such as their language, food (*nasi ambeng*), clothing (*batik*), way of life (tradition of mutual help such as *rewang*, *pakatan*, *kondangan*), and art forms. (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021). The migration of Javanese into Malaysia has brought a few adaptations into Malay culture, which is recognized today as the official Malaysian culture, mainly in the art and entertainment world, such as introducing a traditional dance of 'kuda kepang,' traditional self-defense art of 'silat', traditional puppetry of 'wayang kulit' and traditional music of 'gamelan' (Ramele, 2013). The advent of Javanese in Johor is not as new as in Selangor. Johor is historically an important place associated with the Java movement, as it is one of the regions of Malaysia with the largest Javanese immigrant communities. Malay and Javanese also have a similar religious background, Islam, and the language and culture are also close between Malay and Javanese. Regarding their ethnic relations with other Malay subgroups, they have become easily Malaysian Malays, but their ethnic identity as Javanese has not changed. (Ramele, 2013). According to most of the articles, the population of Java is concentrated in several states, including Johor, Selangor, and Perak. The difference that distinguishes it from other Malays is the use of language.

Javanese Traditional Food

Selamatan activities of Javanese are similar to eating kenduri cuisine in Malaysia or a feast. The Javanese in selamatan in Selangor frequently serve traditional meals like ambeng rice. This dish is prevalent in Malaysia. This dish consists of rice and a side dish that is served in talam leaves that can feed up to five people. Javanese people frequently utilize ancak, a type of woven leaves commonly used to present offerings to the spirits, before talam under particular circumstances.

Nevertheless, in selamatan events, the leaves serve the food (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2018). However, there are a lot of traditional Javanese foods that the young generation does not recognize, such as Kupat Glabed, Sega Ponggol, Ungkep, Lemper Pulut Ayam, Bakpia Teflon, Kuih Sagun, and others (Atrinawati, 2019; Durai, 2021). The passage and progress of time have changed the culture of Javanese society. Modernization has eroded the identity of the new generation of Javanese. Likewise, with their traditional food, their identity is also increasingly lost as young people prefer to live a modern life with modern eating practices. However, there is still a younger generation that still maintains the old culture, and this should be maintained and developed. Traditional Javanese foods such as Nasi Ambeng, Bahulu, Lemper, Sambal Goreng, and Pecal are still preserved. It needs to be maintained so that future generations know their traditional foods.

Food knowledge

Sharif *et al.* (2015) stated that the Malay young generation had limited skills and knowledge of their traditional food. Even the traditional food until the main dishes, most young generations rely on their mothers to prepare the delicacies. Despite that, the issue of lack of skills and knowledge in traditional foods is brought up so that the young generation is always aware that the Malay traditional foods would be quickly forgotten if the concept of continuity is not practiced in their daily life. This awareness will help to save their traditional cuisine from extinction. Cooking with mother and family members for festive celebrations is one of the best techniques to transfer and gain food knowledge. The observation and hands-on process in the kitchen or cooking activities strengthen family warmth and compatibility. Sharing food knowledge is more effective when two-way communication and hands-on cooking are involved. It cannot be denied that participating in activities in the wet market, attending Malay feasts and wedding ceremonies are easy ways to expose the younger generation to the varieties of Malay food and indirectly pass the food knowledge to them (Sharif *et al.*, 2018).

The transmission route is through word-of-mouth, manual labor, observation, and food consumption taught by the older generation to the younger generation (Sharif *et al.*, 2016). Food represents the crossroads of busy times, people, and places as the food supply process becomes very complex (Kwik, 2008). Ethnic communities can also share their culinary and cultural knowledge and expertise at social events and celebrations after experiencing different eating habits and traditions. If each culture, ethnicity, or region has a particular food tradition or custom, one can see the knowledge of food as a cultural feature, especially the importance of traditional food (Sharif *et al.*, 2016). The older generation with expert knowledge of traditional Javanese food needs to play a significant role in sharing the recipe and skills of Javanese food with the young generation. Food knowledge is also one of the factors influencing the perception of traditional Javanese cuisine among the younger generation as if they knew to change their perception.

H₁: There is a positive relationship between knowledge and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods.

Food Practice continuity

Food practice continuity is likewise one element that influences the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods. Food practice continuity refers to a high-quality use of food knowledge that does not halt or modify during the time. The mother is generally the individual who delivers, and the daughter or children receive information in continuing a food practice (Sharif *et al.*, 2016).

According to Sharif, Zahari, Nor, and Muhammad (2013) as referred to in Sharif *et al.* (2016), food knowledge imparted by mothers is vital for the long-term survival of ethnic cuisine customs and identity. When their children reached the adolescent stage, the mothers would generally pass down the knowledge since they believed their children could exert the food knowledge. The ingredients, preparation, cooking techniques, equipment, and culinary competencies are revealed during the food knowledge transmission. Once they have acquired the knowledge and experience of the cooking process, the food practice inherited from their ancestors can continue. When the daughters were in contact with their moms for the duration of their early marriages and requested approximately the ingredients, preparation, cooking methods, and equipment to practice preparing food for her household over the phone, it proved the continuity of ingesting habits.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between the continuity of food practices and the perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Perception of the younger generation

Perception of the young generation towards food is important because they are the linkers of the older generation's legacy to continue the knowledge of their respective traditional foods. According to young Taiwanese, they share their new knowledge and food experiences with friends and family. At the same time, they were gaining new knowledge as they discussed these concepts with others (Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). They can be inspired by the knowledge they have obtained via food and eating. One young Taiwanese admitted that learning more about people from other cultures might influence how she interacted with others (Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). This research can conclude that the perception of the young generation was influenced by the knowledge they gained. It is related to the independent and dependent variables of this study. Furthermore, due to globalization and economic prosperity, the younger generation is overwhelmed by the various types of food around them, and their current diet is seen as fond of Western food and snacks (Adnan & Muniandy, 2012, as cited in Muhammad *et al.*, 2013). Hence, traditional Malaysian cuisine is losing favor among the young generations.

Other methods that can be used to build interest in young generations on Malay traditional foods are bringing them along to buy the ingredients, whether in a wet market or supermarket, familiarizing them with the ingredients, telling them the functions of the ingredients in cooking, and ask them to help in preparation and cooking. It is better to allow them to experience doing it on their own since this can further enhance their interest in Malay traditional foods. For example, let them prepare the ingredients. The most important thing is to make all the processes exciting and enjoyable. By doing this, the young generations will be attracted to join. The young generations will not be attracted if it is boring. When the young generations are attracted and encouraged, they will find that preparing traditional Malay food is not that difficult (Sharif *et al.*, 2016). This demonstrates how knowledge can change the perception of the younger generation.

Methodology

Research design and sample

Globally, generation Y is a group of more than 70 million, composed of teenagers and young people born between 1981 and 2000 whose ages range from 21 to 40 years old and the children of the baby boomers generation (Goldgehn, 2004). For this research, the age of 21 to 40 are suitable because they are mature and suitable to answer the questionnaire. They also had some knowledge of traditional Javanese food, and some knew about preparing and cooking it.

For this research, the research design that is being used is the quantitative method. The technique and

measurements used in quantitative research design provide quantifiable or discrete values (Kothari, 2007, as cited in Asenahabi, 2019). The population is the young generation with the descendants of Java that still remain in Malaysia and focuses on the Javanese people's settlement. This research uses the purpose sampling technique in a non-probability sampling design. The population of the study is 42,000 Javanese people in Bagan Datuk. In this study, the sample size was calculated using RaoSoft software. The margin of error that can be accepted is 5%, the confidence level that is needed for this research is 95%, and the response distribution is 50%. Therefore, as calculated using RaoSoft software, the sample size of this study is 381. However, only 334 responses were collected for this survey.

Instrumentation

This study questionnaire is a self-administered questionnaire in the form of a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from "strongly disagree to agree strongly". Five sections of the self-administered questionnaire were designed that extracted the information about respondents' (1) descendants which the screening question, (2) demographic profile, (3) knowledge, (4) food practice continuity; and lastly (5) perception of traditional Javanese food. A pilot study is a small test of a study intended to verify the reliability and validity of procedures and measurements (Cox & Donnelly, 2011, as cited in Salih Hajem *et al.*, 2016). Cronbach's Alpha is used as the measurement in the pilot test.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data will be collected through an online survey using a Google Form. The data from the web-based survey will be automatically stored in a database for further data mining and analysis (Gordon & McNew, 2008). Online surveys are considered convenient and flexible, as the respondents can answer the questionnaire regardless of time and place (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook will be the platform to distribute the questionnaire, which has been designed as an online survey using Google Forms. The questionnaire is being distributed to family and friends with a descendant of Javanese over almost two months, from December 2021 to February 2022. Next, all the data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed and generated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. The analysis was conducted both descriptive and inferential. For descriptive analysis, it will analyze the demographic section of the questionnaire. Meanwhile, the Pearson correlation was used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Findings

This section will explain the findings based on the information gathered, which results from reliability analysis and the frequency of the demographic profile. Next, this section will also explain the result of descriptive analysis for each variable, and lastly, the result of inferential analysis, which is the Pearson correlation. All the data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0.

Result of reliability analysis

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurements (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In this research, Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of an instrument. The reliability score that is acceptable for research is 0.7 and higher. Before collecting actual data, a pilot test was conducted on 30 people of Java's young generation. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Knowledge	0.907	5
Food Practice Continuity	0.968	5
Perception of Younger Generations	0.860	5

The data collected showed that the variables are between good and excellent. The variables of knowledge and food practice continuity have scores of 0.907 and 0.968, respectively, while the younger generation's perception is 0.860.

Demographic profile

This section explained screening questions used to determine respondents' ancestors. Besides this section also explains the respondents' backgrounds, such as gender, age, and village.

Screening questions

Table 2: Frequency result of screening question

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Screening Question		
Javanese	324	97
Non-Javanese	10	3

Screening questions are important to fulfill the data requirements as it is distributed online. Only 324 of the 334 respondents can be used as data, with the remaining ten considered invalid because they are not Javanese.

Respondents' profile

Table 3: Frequency result of respondents' profile

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	95	29.3
Female	229	70.7
Age		
21-25	254	78.4
26-30	35	10.8
31-35	22	6.8
36-40	13	4.0
Villages		
Johor	50	15.4
Selangor	51	15.7
Perak	186	57.4
Kedah	36	11.1
Terengganu	1	0.3

Table 3 describes the respondents' profiles according to their gender, age, and village in the questionnaire. According to this table, most of the 324 respondents are female, with 229 respondents accounting for 70.7 percent of the total. Meanwhile, with a percentage of 29.3 percent (95 respondents), most are male. The result also showed that the age range 21–25 years old had the majority with 78.4 percent (254 respondents), while the others were

26–30 years old with 10.8% (35 respondents), 31–35 years old with 6.8 percent (22 respondents), and lastly, 36–40 years old with 4.0 percent (13 respondents). Next, this table also shows the villages of the respondents. The majority of respondents' villages are in Perak (57.4%, or 186 respondents), while the others were in Selangor (15.7%, or 51 respondents), Johor (15.4%, or 50 respondents), Kedah (11.1%, or 36 respondents), and lastly Terengganu (0.3%, or 1 respondent).

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

Table 4: Result of Descriptive Analysis

	Mean	Std.Deviation
Knowledge		
I know and am familiar with traditional Javanese food.	3.72	.56470
I know Javanese traditional food from my family.	4.44	.55641
I know the history of traditional Javanese food.	2.97	.54758
I know the ingredients used in Javanese cuisine.	2.97	.56948
I know how to cook traditional Javanese food.	2.74	.62015
Food Practice Continuity		
The need to practice traditional Javanese food is important.	4.29	.46405
Food practice continuity is important to preserve Javanese traditional food.	4.30	.46672
Sharing and passing on the knowledge ensure the food practice continuity on traditional Javanese food.	4.31	.46392
The continuity of Javanese food practice can be a symbol of pride for Javanese ethnicity.	4.30	.46802
Food practices continuity on Javanese food is proven by the presence of practices from the family legacy.	4.30	.46004
Perception of Younger Generations		
I would like to eat traditional Javanese food if I knew the food.	3.91	.55058
I would cook the traditional Javanese food if I had the knowledge.	3.62	.66667
I would be interested in trying traditional Javanese food if I knew its history.	3.71	.64380
I will use my knowledge of traditional Javanese food to ensure that traditional Javanese food continues.	4.36	.50000
Knowledge and practices of traditional Javanese food will influence my interest in Javanese food.	4.37	.48605

The descriptive analysis in Table 4 described the mean level for three variables: knowledge, food practice continuity, and perceptions of younger generations. For Javanese young people, most agree with the highest mean score that they knew traditional Javanese food from their family ($\mu = 4.44$). Meanwhile, for other items, young Javanese people agree that they knew and were familiar with traditional Javanese food ($\mu = 3.72$). Javanese young people moderately agree that they knew the history of traditional Javanese food ($\mu = 2.97$), they knew the ingredients used in Javanese cuisine ($\mu = 2.97$), and they knew how to cook traditional Javanese food ($\mu = 2.74$). As for the variables of food practice continuity, it showed that all the variables had the highest mean score, which means they mostly agree on the importance of Javanese food practice continuity. The last variable on the younger generation's perception showed that they mostly agreed with the highest mean score that knowledge and practices about traditional Javanese food will influence their interest in Javanese food ($\mu = 4.3796$).

4.4 Result of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Rule for Pearson Correlation Analysis

Strength of relationship	Coefficient, <i>r</i>	
	Positive	Negative
None	0.0 to 0.1	0.0 to -0.1
Weak	0.1 to 0.3	-0.1 to -0.3
Moderate	0.3 to 0.5	-0.3 to -0.5
Strong	0.5 to 1.0	-0.5 to -1.0

Source (Cohen, 2013)

Table 5 shows the rule of Pearson correlation that has been used as guidelines for interpreting a correlation coefficient, *r*. Pearson correlation was used to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The correlation coefficient can take a range of values from +1 to 1. A value of 0 indicates no relationship between the two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive relationship; that is, as the value of one variable increases, so does the value of the other variable.

Table 6: Correlations Between Knowledge and Perception of the Younger Generation
Correlations

		Knowledge	Perception
	Pearson Correlation	1	.337**
Knowledge	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	324	324
	Pearson Correlation	.337**	1
Perception	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	324	324

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H_1 : There is a positive relationship between knowledge and perception among the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Table 6 shows the Pearson correlation result that was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Pearson correlation was used to analyze the relationship between the knowledge and perception of the younger generation on traditional Javanese foods. The p-value of knowledge and perception is 0.337, which shows a moderately positive linear relationship between the knowledge and perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Table 7 : Correlations Between Food Practice Continuity and Perception of Younger Generation
Correlations

		Food Practice Continuity	Perception
	Pearson Correlation	1	.259**
Food Practice Continuity	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	324	324
	Pearson Correlation	.259**	1
Perception	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	324	324

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H₂: There is a positive relationship between the continuity of food practices and the perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation result that was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Pearson correlation was used to analyze the relationship between the continuity of food practices and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods. The *p*-value of food practice continuity and perception is 0.259, which shows a weak positive linear relationship between the food practice continuity and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods.

Discussion

Based on the findings above, it is clear that for both results, there is a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and hence, both variables move in the same direction. If the independent variables increase, the dependent variable will also increase unless otherwise noted.

The Relationship Between Knowledge and the Perception of Younger Generation on Javanese Traditional Foods

The first objective was to analyze the relationship between knowledge and perception of traditional Javanese foods among the younger generation.

H₁: There is a positive relationship between knowledge and the perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Table 5 shows that knowledge and perception among the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods have a moderately positive linear relationship. This is because the *p*-values = 0.000, a substantial 0.01 ($p > 0.01$) amount. Based on the results, knowledge, and perception among the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods, there is a moderately positive relationship because the correlation coefficient is $r = 0.337$. The younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods will improve as their knowledge grows. It means that the perception of the Javanese young generation will change because of their knowledge. According to past research, enhancing knowledge can influence our perception of something (Yang & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). Therefore, from the result, it can be concluded that the first objective was reached because the hypothesis was accepted.

The Relationship Between Food Practice Continuity and the Perception of Younger Generation on Javanese Traditional Foods

The second objective was to analyze the relationship between the continuity of food practices and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between the food practices continuity and the perception of the younger generation of traditional Javanese foods.

Table 6 shows that food practice continuity and the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods have a weak positive linear relationship. This is because the *p*-values = 0.000, a substantial 0.01 ($p > 0.01$) amount. Based on the results, food practice continuity and the perception of younger generations of traditional Javanese foods have a weak positive relationship because of the correlation coefficient of $r = 0.259$. If the food practice continuity increases, the younger generation's perception of traditional Javanese foods will increase. The perception of the young generation of traditional Javanese foods will change throughout the practice. Durai (2021) states, "by watching their mother cooking and baking, he became more interested in cooking Javanese

foods.” That statement showed that the continuation of food practices would influence the perception of young generations toward traditional Javanese foods. Therefore, from the result, it can be assumed that the second objective was reached because the hypothesis was accepted.

Conclusion

The findings proved a relationship between knowledge and continuity of food practices that can influence the perception of young Javanese generations of traditional foods. This study also provides new input, such as the extent of the knowledge of the young generation and the new perception of the new generation towards traditional food. It explores research opportunities and gaps related to traditional Javanese food in Malaysia that the previous researcher did not address. All the previous research was qualitative, and there is no sample of a framework and questionnaire that can be used as references. There has also been little research on the topic of Javanese traditional food. In the future, the next researcher can study how to raise the awareness of young Javanese generations in Malaysia about preserving their traditional food and help to raise awareness of the importance of preserving traditional Javanese food so as not to be lost in time.

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