

“Revitalising Traditional Malay Kuih Through Facebook: A Study of Online Culinary Knowledge Sharing”

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ABSTRACT

Social media has revolutionized the way people connect, communicate, and share cultural heritage. Facebook, as a dominant image-sharing and engagement platform, plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting culinary traditions. Traditional Malay kuih, an integral part of Malaysia's food heritage, is facing threats of extinction due to declining intergenerational knowledge transfer and limited public awareness. This study investigates how the Facebook food community, particularly the group Masak Apa Hari Ni (MAHN), contributes to sharing and preserving knowledge of traditional Malay kuih. Through qualitative content analysis of five highly engaged posts, the study identifies six major themes that demonstrate how Facebook facilitates social learning, emotional engagement, and collective knowledge sharing around traditional kuih. The findings highlight Facebook's potential as a virtual archive and learning space for cultural food heritage in the digital age.

Keywords: Traditional Food, Malay kuih, social media, Facebook community, food heritage, digital preservation

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an essential part of everyday life, serving as a primary platform for communication, self-expression, and the dissemination of information. It allows users to share personal updates, express opinions, and remain informed about current trends. One of its most dynamic applications is within the culinary domain, where users document their cooking experiences and seek culinary advice from others with similar interests and expertise (Lee et al., 2014; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Yusof et al., 2023).

Within this digital landscape, heritage food has gained renewed attention. Defined as “traditional regional cuisine infused with cultural values that reflect the lives, customs, and identities of communities passed down through generations” (Omar et al., 2015), heritage food is a cultural asset that connects past and present. Traditional Malay food practices, in particular, represent a rich tapestry of culinary heritage passed on from elder generations. However, many traditional dishes, especially Malay kuih, are at risk of being forgotten due

to lifestyle changes, urbanization, and reduced intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Sharif et al., 2015; Kamaruzaman et al., 2022).

Facebook food communities, informal digital groups formed around shared culinary interests, have emerged as alternative spaces to preserve and share traditional food knowledge. These groups, such as Masak Apa Hari Ni (MAHN), allow users to post recipes, cooking techniques, and cultural narratives. Group creators and administrators manage participation, often controlling visibility through privacy settings. In closed groups, shared content remains within the group, creating a secure, focused space for learning and interaction (Yusof et al., 2023; Fauzi, Razali, & Kamarulzaman, 2023).

Traditional Malay kuih is a significant part of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage. It reflects local ingredients, preparation methods, and communal values. According to Pieniak et al. (2009), traditional food is defined as food that has been prepared and consumed in a specific region for a long period. However, transformations in agricultural practices, raw material availability, and consumer preferences have altered traditional food systems (Kuhnlein, Erasmus, & Spigelski, 2009). Today's younger generation is often disconnected from traditional kuih due to a lack of early exposure and prioritization of digital entertainment over cultural learning (Sani & Farid, 2024).

Ismail et al. (2013) highlighted that one of the main challenges in preserving traditional Malay cuisine is the young generation's limited appreciation for its cultural values. This disconnect is amplified by limited sharing and exposure within families and communities. Consequently, there is a growing need to explore alternative platforms, such as social media, that can reignite interest in heritage food.

Despite its potential, there has been limited scholarly attention given to how social media platforms, especially Facebook, can serve as repositories and learning hubs for traditional Malay kuih. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the role of Facebook food communities in preserving and sharing traditional Malay kuih practices.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the role of Facebook food communities as a source of knowledge about traditional Malay kuih.
2. To examine the types of Facebook posts and community interactions that facilitate learning and sharing of traditional Malay kuih.

By understanding the digital behaviors within these communities, this study hopes to inform future strategies for heritage food preservation. It also contributes to the food industry and cultural sectors by highlighting how social media can be leveraged to revitalize traditional cuisine, particularly among younger generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Facebook as a Platform for Interaction and Learning

Facebook is a widely used online social networking platform that enables users to interact through a variety of content formats such as text updates, images, videos, and external links. Users engage with content by liking, commenting, sharing, or using emotive reactions, creating an interactive and collaborative virtual environment. These affordances make Facebook an effective tool for connecting individuals with shared interests across geographical boundaries (Kim, 2019; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018).

During periods such as the COVID-19 lockdowns, when face-to-face interaction was restricted, Facebook became an essential tool for communication and support, fostering online communities and emotional connectivity (Harris, 2020; Marengo et al., 2021). Moreover, Facebook has been used as an informal learning environment, where individuals can discuss challenges, share knowledge, and exchange support (Selwyn, 2007). Ulla and Perales (2020) highlighted that integrating Facebook as a virtual whiteboard in an English language classroom encouraged student participation and improved learning engagement.

However, concerns have also been raised regarding the overuse of Facebook. Andreassen et al., (2012) introduced the concept of Facebook Addiction (FA), suggesting that excessive engagement with the platform can foster obsessive behavior. More recent studies, such as Ripon et al. (2022), observed that individuals who lack strong offline social support tend to rely more heavily on Facebook during periods of stress, potentially exacerbating psychological dependency.

Significance of Social Media in Knowledge Exchange

Social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, have transformed the way people communicate, especially in the context of cultural and knowledge sharing. They enable the continuous exchange of ideas, lifestyles, and practices among users from diverse backgrounds (Trisha, 2012; You et al., 2017). Visual-based sharing, particularly images and videos of food, is increasingly common, reflecting the rise of “foodstagramming” and culinary storytelling that contributes to cultural identity formation (Fauzi et al., 2023; Sani & Farid, 2024).

These platforms also function as informal digital archives where users document personal experiences, regional cuisines, and traditional practices. However, alongside their benefits, social media platforms pose challenges such as the spread of misinformation. Al-Maatouk et al., (2021) emphasized the risk of misinformation during crises, noting that the viral nature of content can distort public perception. Kumar et al. (2018) likewise found that fabricated information spreads rapidly on digital platforms and can affect decision-making in real-world contexts.

Despite these concerns, social media remains a powerful tool for cultural preservation and lifestyle education, particularly when used responsibly and collaboratively.

Traditional Malay Kuih as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Traditional Malay kuih (desserts and snacks) represent a significant aspect of Malaysia’s intangible heritage. According to Humairah et al., (2015), traditional kuih incorporates unique ingredients, preparation techniques, and cooking tools that have been handed down through generations. Often rooted in religious and cultural rituals, Malay kuih is a symbol of regional identity and communal history.

The European Union defines traditional foods as those linked to a region and transmitted over generations through consistent usage and social practice. Similarly, oral transmission plays a critical role in preserving the recipes and cultural meanings of Malay kuih (Rahman et al., 2018). However, modernisation and globalisation have led younger generations to favor convenience foods, decreasing their familiarity with traditional culinary practices (Sharif et al., 2015; Kamaruzaman et al., 2022).

In recent years, digital media has emerged as a viable alternative for transmitting traditional knowledge, including recipes, preparation methods, and cultural symbolism. Digital food communities, such as Facebook groups, provide platforms where such knowledge can be shared, preserved, and revitalized in engaging ways. They offer a space for both experienced and novice cooks to interact, making traditional food practices accessible even to those disconnected from their roots (Yusof et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a content analysis approach. Content analysis is a widely used technique for systematically interpreting textual data by identifying patterns, themes, or meanings (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). It enables researchers to examine the presence and relationship of specific words, themes, or concepts within textual communication (Columbia Public Health, 2022). This method is particularly suitable for exploring how online communities engage in meaning-making through user-generated content.

The approach used in this study aligns with conventional content analysis, which is often applied when existing research on a phenomenon is limited, allowing categories and themes to emerge inductively from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

According to Powers and Knapp (2006), content analysis encompasses various strategies for examining written material. It involves coding and categorizing large amounts of text in a systematic and unobtrusive manner to identify patterns in word usage, thematic structures, and discourse features. The ultimate goal is to provide a detailed description of the content by analysing "who says what, to whom, and with what effect" (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This makes content analysis especially useful for studying social media communication, where messages are multidimensional and context-rich.

Data Selection

Data were collected from the Malaysian Facebook food community that focus on home cooking and traditional recipes. The primary dataset consisted of post from Masak Apa Hari Ni (MAHN), complimented by data from two other related public groups; Resepi Traditional Melayu and Kuih Warisan Nusantara, to provide broader insights into online engagement.

The time frame of January 2018 to December 2019 was selected because it reflected peak user activity before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, during social media platforms were heavily used to share home-cooked meals and traditional recipes (Fauzi, Razali, & Kamarulzaman, 2023). Posts related solely to advertising, marketing, sales or job postings were included to maintain focus on organic user interaction and community driven sharing.

Participants and Sampling Criteria

The sample consisted of five highly engaged posts from the MAHN Facebook group that met the following criteria:

1. The posts included images or videos of traditional Malay kuih.
2. The accompanying captions were descriptive or informative.
3. The posts attracted a considerable number of user interactions (likes, comments, and replies).
4. The comments demonstrated varied responses such as inquiries, advice, nostalgia, or emotional expression.

Each selected post included a range of user-generated comments and interactions, which served as the primary data for analysis. Although participants' identities were anonymized, their contributions provided valuable insight into communal knowledge-sharing and cultural engagement practices.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed manually using thematic analysis, which is a common qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Each post and its associated comments were read repeatedly to ensure a deep understanding of the content. Meaningful units were coded, and related codes were grouped into broader themes that aligned with the study's research objectives.

All quotes were extracted verbatim from the Facebook posts and comments. Where necessary, minor adjustments (e.g., correction of typos or abbreviation expansion) were made for clarity while preserving the original meaning.

The final themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal consistency and relevance to the study objectives. This process helped to uncover the ways in which Facebook facilitates community knowledge exchange and engagement with traditional Malay kuih.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified six emergent themes from the content analysis of five selected posts in the Masak Apa Hari Ni (MAHN) Facebook group: (1) Social and Relationship Development, (2) Knowledge Sharing, (3) Social Learning Skills, (4) Expressing Emotion, (5) Personal Experience, and (6) Supportive Community. These themes illustrate how Facebook functions as a dynamic platform for preserving and promoting traditional Malay kuih.

Table 1 summarizes the respondents who contributed to the thematic analysis. All quotes were provided by female participants, identified by anonymized codes and quote IDs. This reflects women's active role in preserving and sharing traditional kuih knowledge within the Facebook group. The table shows how these contributions support the six themes discussed in the study.

Table 1: Summary of the Respondents

No.	Gender	Respondent Code	Quote ID
1	Female	K3	Q1
2	Female	K1	Q31
3	Female	K5	Q17
4	Female	K1	Q2
5	Female	K1	Q9
6	Female	K2	Q35
7	Female	K2	Q5
8	Female	K2	Q5
9	Female	K5	Q29
10	Female	K1	Q25
11	Female	K1	Q12
12	Female	K4	Q50
13	Female	K1	Q54
14	Female	K5	Q69
15	Female	K5	Q65
16	Female	K1	Q42
17	Female	K1	Q32
18	Female	K5	Q5

Theme 1: Social and Relationship Development

The first theme highlights the role of Facebook in nurturing social bonds and collective engagement around food heritage. Users demonstrated emotional closeness and community cohesion through light-hearted interactions, questions, and invitations to collaborate. This theme includes three categories: motivation, humor, and togetherness.

Examples:

1. "Later, we will try to do the same" (K3, female)

2. “Live in Telaga Mas, do you know how to make this kuih Telaga Mas?” (K1, Q31)
3. “When are we going to eat this kuih karas together?” (K5, Q17)

Such interactions reinforce findings from psychological studies suggesting that shared culinary activities enhance social cohesion and well-being (Sani & Farid, 2024; Yusof et al., 2023). When people come together around cultural food topics, they create a virtual sense of belonging that mimics real-world community.

Theme 2: Knowledge Sharing

The second theme illustrates how Facebook serves as a site for **peer-led learning**. Participants used the comment sections to ask questions, clarify recipes, and compare knowledge about ingredients or preparation methods. Categories within this theme include: learning sessions, opinion-sharing, and clarification.

Examples:

1. “This looks delicious, dik. What kind of flour do you use?” (K1, Q2)
2. “The green is glutinous... inside it not sure... first time I saw it” (K1, Q9)
3. “Pulut sekaya kuih uses many eggs; seri muka uses fewer. Many think it’s the same.” (K2, Q35)

This reflects what Wang & Noe (2010) described as intentional knowledge sharing, where users voluntarily exchange task-related insights. In heritage food contexts, such informal learning ensures the continuity of traditional practices otherwise at risk of fading.

Theme 3: Social Learning Skills

Participants displayed notable social learning behaviors, especially around problem-solving and respectful dialogue. This theme was divided into effective communication, collaborative troubleshooting, and interpersonal respect.

Examples:

1. A: “How is the coconut milk at the same level? I just want to learn, hehe.” (K2, Q5)
2. B: “Don’t put as much coconut milk as glutinous rice... put just enough to sink a little.”
3. “I want to try it using a toaster.” (K5, Q29)

These examples align with Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, which posits that people learn not only from direct instruction but also from observing and interacting with others. The Facebook group serves as a low-risk, high-reward environment for trial-and-error learning.

Theme 4: Expressing Emotion

Many users conveyed sentimental or nostalgic emotions, underscoring the deep personal connections they have with traditional kuih. Emotional expression is often overlooked in culinary scholarship but plays a central role in cultural engagement.

Examples:

1. “Wow, Kak Zura is here!” (K1, Q25)
2. “My favourite kuih, I haven’t eaten it in so long.” (K1, Q12)
3. “Your kuih looks delicious... it gives me ideas to sell it.” (K4, Q50)

This emotional engagement confirms recent findings that social media platforms encourage users to externalize personal feelings, which in turn enhances community trust and identity (Marengo et al., 2021; Derks et al., 2008).

Theme 5: Personal Experience

The fifth theme reflects users' intergenerational memories and lived experiences, which were frequently shared in response to traditional kuih posts. Categories include family narratives, personal memories, and historical anecdotes.

Examples:

1. "Yes... just like the kuih in Sarawak we used to eat when we were little." (K1, Q54)
2. "My mom sold this in the 70s... using charcoal and homemade flour." (K5, Q69)
3. "It's been a long time... my father liked this kuih." (K5, Q65)

These personal stories contribute to what UNESCO (2021) identifies as intangible cultural heritage, where oral history and embodied experience are critical to cultural preservation.

Theme 6: Supportive Community

Lastly, the Facebook group demonstrated a strong culture of encouragement and mutual aid. Users frequently offered solutions, praised efforts, and motivated others to try new things. The subcategories identified include: encouragement, suggestions, and constructive feedback.

Examples:

1. "Let us try to make this kuih." (K1, Q42)
2. "New kuih... please try it." (K1, Q32)
3. "If you don't have an oven, you can use a gas stove." (K5, Q5)

This aligns with digital ethnographic studies suggesting that peer support enhances user engagement and motivation in online learning communities (Fauzi et al., 2023; Nowell et al., 2017).

Synthesis and Implications

Together, these six themes demonstrate that Facebook food communities serve as living archives and dynamic learning ecosystems for traditional Malay kuih. The interactions go beyond passive content consumption—they reflect active cultural negotiation, shared emotion, and real-time knowledge exchange.

This finding strengthens previous research asserting that social media platforms can complement traditional education and family transmission as mechanisms for preserving heritage food (Yusof et al., 2023; Kamaruzaman et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study explored how the Facebook food community Masak Apa Hari Ni (MAHN) serves as a platform for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge related to traditional Malay kuih. Thematic analysis of five selected posts revealed six key themes: social and relationship development, knowledge sharing, social learning skills, emotional expression, personal experience, and supportive community. These themes collectively highlight the multifaceted role of social media in fostering cultural continuity.

The findings indicate that Facebook facilitates not only knowledge transmission but also emotional and experiential storytelling. Comments that include personal memories, feelings of nostalgia, and encouragement significantly contribute to community engagement. Such user interactions cultivate a virtual space where traditional recipes are not only learned but also celebrated. Posts that evoke emotion or offer supportive advice generate enthusiasm among group members, motivating them to try traditional kuih recipes, some for the first time.

Furthermore, the Facebook community plays a vital role in enabling peer-to-peer learning, where participants share insights, clarify details, and exchange culinary tips. This kind of informal learning supports the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, especially in an era where many traditional food practices are at risk of disappearing due to modernization and changing lifestyles.

Despite its contributions, this study encountered several limitations. The dataset was confined to a specific timeframe and relied on a limited number of posts due to the difficulty in identifying organic content focused exclusively on traditional Malay kuih. A significant proportion of posts in food-related Facebook groups are commercial in nature, which limited the selection of data suitable for in-depth analysis. Additionally, the lack of demographic data and reliance solely on text-based content restrict the ability to generalize findings across generations or user backgrounds.

For future research, it is recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, incorporating interviews or surveys to capture user motivations and perspectives more comprehensively. Expanding the dataset to include a broader variety of Facebook groups or exploring other platforms like Instagram or TikTok could also offer comparative insights. Further studies should also consider focusing on youth engagement to better understand the generational gaps in traditional food knowledge and digital learning.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on digital heritage preservation by demonstrating that Facebook food communities can act as living archives and collaborative learning environments. For academicians, cultural advocates, and the food industry, these findings affirm that social media is not just a space for sharing recipes—it is a powerful medium for sustaining culinary heritage. The use of platforms like Facebook ensures that traditional Malay kuih remains relevant and appreciated, especially among the younger generation, thereby supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer in the digital age.

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