

Food Communication to Strengthen Cultural Identity: A Case Study on Saparan Bekakak Traditions in Indonesia

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Abstract

Food has a crucial role in human culture and social interaction. Food is vital in various traditional ceremonies and rituals, especially in Javanese culture. Saparan Bekakak is a Javanese tradition that uses food or offerings as a ritual symbol. Food communication is a field of study that studies how food functions as a medium of communication in social and cultural contexts. This study explores the food communication model in strengthening the cultural identity of Saparan Bekakak as a noble tradition of the Indonesian nation. This research uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative research design for the type of case study. The subjects in this study consisted of nine participants, including community leaders (kamituwo, dukuh, bekakak bride makers, cooks, and offerings), local communities, and visitors to the Saparan Bekakak traditional ceremony. The data collection techniques in this study consist of interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis in the study consists of several steps (i.e., data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn) as well as source triangulation and triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the research data. This study finds a food communication model that strengthens the cultural identity of Saparan Bekakak as a noble tradition of the Indonesian nation. Food in the tradition of saparan bekakak is interpreted as a form of gratitude blessings, a medium of communication with ancestors for safety, cultural enlightenment, and strengthening solidarity/togetherness. There are variations and shifts in the meaning of food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, encouraging the negotiation of meaning, which catalyses the renewal and strengthening of identity. Culture. This research's implications or theoretical impact are in the form of theoretical contributions about food communication that can construct and strengthen cultural identity and practically in the form of food communication models that can be applied to enhance cultural identity, especially in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

Keywords: Food Communication, Social Interaction, Javanese Traditions, Cultural Identity, Symbolic Interactionism.

Food has a vital role in human culture and social interaction. Anthropologists argue that food not only plays a role as the primary human need but is also related to social phenomena and

the relationship between nature and culture (Girardelli, 2004). Food has a fundamental role in shaping the past and understanding of self and culture (Duruz & Manganas, 2023). The cultural

authenticity and heterogeneity of the food make it known as a local food (Purnomo et al., 2023). Food provides nutrients for the mind, body, and soul, which is vital in life (Gingell et al., 2024). Culture-based food means that future generations of food rulers know food management (Khan, 2020). Disease prevention, control of body functions, reduce the risk of disease, reduce the effects of aging, and maintain the body by reducing allergies and boosting the immune system are some of the functional roles of food (Rajagukguk et al., 2021).

There is a profound symbolic significance to the food selection, the process of choosing it, and the food it offers. There is a meaning behind the manufacture, culture, and environment regarding foodstuffs, dishes, and eating practices (Parasecoli, 2011). Food production itsone way to reduce food waste (Šálková et al., 2023). Food choices through diet programs that are trending today not only aim to promote personal well-being but also consider the ethics and environmental impact of food choices, but it is necessary to consider the communication of risks and benefits (Boehm et al., 2021). Nowadays, many people express their experiences and opinions about food-related choices and then share them on social media platforms (Bartelmeß & Godemann, 2022). In Canada, encouraging healthy food choices is done by providing information and cultural approaches through knowledge, skills, values, cultural views, and the world community (Gyapay et al., 2022). Participation in cultural events such as community gatherings and weddings and how to handle the food served are concerns (Sari et al., 2022).

Food has an important role in traditions, especially in Javanese culture. Rituals are closely related to food and beverages that have the benefits of social bonding, changes in emotions, and consumer perceptions (Ratcliffe et al., 2019). Each type of food in the uba rampe has a special meaning for each type (Panuntun & Susanta, 2021). As done in the Cowongan ritual, food consists of flowers, smoke, and summons

spirits (Supriyanto, 2023). In the Tedak Siten; children are asked to walk on seven jadah (local food) as a depiction of parents so that their children can overcome obstacles in life (Fuadi et al., 2024). The traditional Mauludan ritual at the Kanoman Palace uses food for Panjang amulet (rice talisman offering) and food for the pelal alit ceremony (rice talisman offering) (Rosmalia & Dewiyanti, 2023). Food habits and traditions are often used as a means to spread cultural identity (Wood, 2017). Food is a marker of regional and ethnic identity and distinguishes it from others (Timothy & Ron, 2013).

Saparan Bekakak of the Javanese traditions use food as a symbol in ritual symbolic tradition that uses interesting characteristics (Panuntun & Susanta, 2021). The culture and traditions of the Islam exciting Kingdom are located in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, including Kasunanan, Mangkunegaran, Sultanate, and Pakualaman, known as the Javanese (Rofiq, 2024). Tourists are very interested in the process and ritual activities of the Javanese people (Rosmalia & Dewiyanti, 2023). For some Javanese, Saparan is believed to be a month that does not bring good luck, which is closely related to the ceremony of returning home (Waston et al., 2024). The Saparan Bekakak tradition is one of the manifestations of Gunung Gamping folklore (Arwansyah et al., 2023).

Food communication is a field of study that studies how food functions as a medium of communication in social and cultural contexts. Food communication is generally intended to provide messages that influence the emotional and functional, or after-food consumption activities (Felicetti et al., 2023). Food functions as a form of communication and includes studies in the field of science (Girardelli, 2004). Food communication is a new and contemporary field of study (Norton et al., 2023). In Europe, communication of food risks and benefits is an effort to develop the effectiveness of communication strategies (Barnett et al., 2011). For example, different food communication strategies in each culture are shown in Spain,

Italy and Greece's acceptance of ,genetically modified (GM) technologies in food production (Costa-Font & Gil, 2009).

There is a potential for a shift in the meaning of food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition as time goes by. The construction of food lists can influence food culture and the meaning of food, as well as environmental factors (Scarpa et al., 2021). It is a consideration that food is not only in its material form but also has meanings, practices and socio-cultural interconnected dimensions that are interconnected (Duruz & Manganas, 2023). Interpretation the meaning of food in human life is an important thing to do (Aktaş-Polat & Polat, 2020). Whether food is only matter, physical stances, o objects, etc, is a question related to the meaning of food in human life (Mašek, 2023). The emergence of various meanings and relationships between communities, food and food systems is ,reflected in the concept of food sovereignty (Pontes et al., 2024). Furthermore, the cultural and political meaning of food is affected by the existence of global standards (Eriksson et al., 2019).

There is meaning of food in tradition. Food and drink have a dual meaning that is not only related to cultural identity and pleasure but also related to power and control (Nair et al., 2022). Food is interpreted thematically as related to associated with of food, the embodiment of the physical and moral (Flavin, 2022). Food has five meanings, associated with sacred, aesthetic and health (Kokkoris & Stavrova, 2021). For example, in a study conducted in China there is a difference in the meaning of good food (Browning et al., 2019). In another study, it was stated that self-provision had positive individual benefits, such as healthier eating habits (Suomalainen et al., 2023).

The influence of foreign culture and new media has the potential to influence the way the Javanese people in Ambarketawang interpret food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. The activities and creativity of those who live in Indonesia have grown into a traditional culture or cultural heritage that has distinctive

characteristics (Fauzi et al., 2019). The cultural shift that is produced together is one of the discussions on the topic of culture (Little et al., 2021). The shift from the original and consistent occurs in new duties in the search for new experiences and ways of life (Featherstone, 2010). Food coalition of new priorities that are minimal in relying on gastronomic expertise rather than the dynamics of social differences (Onorati & Giardullo, 2020). Cultural knowledge and shifting traditional knowledge resulted in a decrease in local food consumption, which had implications for psychological, health, spiritual, social, and cultural well-being (Little et al., 2021).

There is a potential negotiation of the meaning of food between various stakeholders in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. This means that negotiation is a shared responsibility to reduce disambiguate and meaningful learning constructions and interactions (Neuvonen et al., 2022). Understanding can be done meaningfully through conventional social interaction (García-Avilés, 2021). Interaction and media are the me meaning in the form of language (Wedin & Norlund Shaswar, 2023). This means can be done through participation in social interactions (Viktorelius, 2020). Complex negotiations of meaning and identity to conduct research for several reasons, such as gaining knowledge of traditional foods and their meanings in Javanese culture. Local identity, consumer behaviour, transfer of cultural heritage to future generations and are important roles of traditional food (Agric, 2021). External forces and the effects of globalization have led to the loss or elimination behaviour of traditional foods developed by various cultural groups (Kala & Nautiyal, 2023). In the social context, to protect the culture of ancestors, traditional food knowledge (TFK) is needed and this is an important aspect of human life (Wibisono et al., 2020). To support the elders in restoring the transmission of knowledge across generations, it can be done through potential paths, one of which is by strengthening traditional foods (Demientieff et al., 2023). Food

festivals are also a way to revive traditional food knowledge (Fontefrancesco & Zocchi, 2020).

In-depth studies on food communication in the context of Javanese culture (Saparan Bekakak Tradition) are still limited. Research on food communication that has been carried out includes *Savoring Semiotics: Food in Intercultural Communication* (Parasecoli, 2011), *Food Communication and its Related Sentiment in Local and Organic Food Videos on YouTube* (Meza & Yamanaka, 2020), *Christian hospitality in Javanese bancaan tradition* (Panuntun & Susanta, 2021), *Communicating Food Risk-Benefit Assessments: Edible Insects as Red Meat Replacers* (Boehm et al., 2021), *Exploring the Linkages of Digital Food Communication and Analog Food Behavior: A Scoping Review* (Bartelmeß & Godemann, 2022), *Examining the feasibility of a brief parent intervention designed to promote positive food communication with infants* (Norton et al., 2023).

The understanding of how food functions as a communication medium in Saparan Bekakak is still not explored in depth. Previous research on Indonesian culture, especially Javanese traditions, has not specifically discussed food (sajen) as a communication medium. Research that has been conducted includes *Islamic Shari'a Configuration Of Buka Luwur Tradition In Kudus* (Mundakir & Hidayat, 2020); *Local Wisdom of the Begalan Tradition in Traditional Weddings: Insights from Banyumas-Central Java Indonesia* (Nurchotimah et al., 2023); *Revitalizingg the Family Education Environment: Integrating the Values of Memayu Hayuning Bawana in Saparan Culture* (Pujiyanti et al., 2023); *Culture, Religion, And Harmony: The Struggle For Roles In Diversity In Indonesia* (Waston et al., 2024); dan *Continuity and change process to sanctify the holy month of Muharram in the Suroan tradition* (Rofiq, 2024).

The novelty of the research is shown empirically, namely that this study gives a special focus on the Saparan Bekakak tradition

in Ambarketawang, Yogyakarta, which has not been widely researched in the context of food communication. Some previous studies on Javanese traditions and saparan have been mentioned before, but the topic of discussion is not related to food communication. Some other studies include *The Functions of the Folklore Gunung Gamping in Indonesia: A Geomithological Exploration* (Arwansyah et al., 2023). The novelty of the research from the theoretical side is shown by the use of the *Integration of Food Communication Theory and Symbolic Interactionism*. The concept of Food Communication states that communication can be done through verbal and non-verbal language, food is a form of nonverbal communication through which it can share meaning with others (Greene & Cramer, 2011). *Symbolic Interactionism Theory* is used to understand contemporary social relationships, the uniqueness of each relationship, and its changing and unpredictable nature (Wigfield et al., 2022). The novelty of the methodology is shown by the application of qualitative methods with an emic perspective using *Participatory Action Research*, which involves local communities in the research process. *Participatory action research (PAR)* is a research approach in social systems that experience problems by prioritizing the value of knowledge (Cornish et al., 2023). The purpose of this study is to explore the food communication model in strengthening the cultural identity of Saparan Bekakak as a noble tradition of the Indonesia nation.

Research Method

This research uses a constructivism paradigm with a qualitative research design in the type of case study. This research used a qualitative approach, because this method did not use Statistics (Fadillah, 2022). The subjects in this study consisted of 9 people. In more detail, information about the research subject is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Research Subject Data

No.	Initial	Status	Gender
1.	Research Subject 1	<i>Kamituwo Kalurahan</i> Ambarketawang	Male
2.	Research Subject 2	<i>Dukuh</i> Gamping Kidul	Male
3.	Research Subject 3	<i>Bekakak</i> Maker	Male
4.	Research Subject 4	Cooks and priests	Female
5.	Research Subject 5	Visitors	Female
6.	Research Subject 6	Local Community	Female
7.	Research Subject 7	Local Community	Male
8.	Research Subject 8	Visitors	Male
9.	Research Subject 9	Visitors	Male

Source: Authors

The data collection techniques in this study consist of interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face with key informants (Troisi et al., 2024). Data analysis in the study consists of several steps (i.e., data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn) as well as source triangulation and triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the research data.

Results and Discussion

This research reveals the important role of food communication in strengthening cultural identity, with a special focus on the Saparan

Bekakak tradition as a noble tradition of the Indonesia nation. Through an in-depth analysis of the eating practices and rituals associated with the Saparan Bekakak tradition, this study highlights how food serves as a powerful medium of communication in preserving and transmitting cultural values. The following findings illustrate the complexity of the relationship between food, communication, and cultural identity in the context of the Saparan Bekakak tradition, as well as its implications for social cohesion and cultural heritage preservation in the contemporary era. The researcher grouped the findings of the research data from the interviews as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Interview Results

No.	Answer Categorization	Interview excerpts	Research Subjects
1.	Shifting meanings of food: FoMO (Faer of Missing Out), pleasure, different sensations and sensations	<i>Kalau yang muda FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) saja</i>	Research Subjects 1 (<i>kamituwo/ male</i>)
		<i>If the young ones are just FoMO (Fear of Missing Out)</i>	
		<i>Berebut makanan disitu mungkin untuk kesenangan ya, berpartisipasi dalam acara adat, acara yang memang dari dulu diselenggarakan khususnya di Gamping, mungkin ya pengen dapat feel nya biasanya kayak gitu. Mungkin lebih ke sensasi berebutnya</i>	Research Subjects 6 (local community/ female)
		<i>Fighting for food there may be for fun, yes, participating in traditional events, events that have been held for a long time, especially in Gamping, maybe you want to get the usual feeling like that. Maybe it's more about the sensation of scrambling</i>	
		<i>Yang paling ditunggu-tunggu adalah saling merebutkan (makanan) itu, ada sensasinya sendiri.</i>	Research Subjects 8 (Visitors/ male)

		What is most awaited is to fight for each other (food), there is a sensation of its own.	
2.	Variations in the interpretation of the meaning of food: Forms of gratitude, blessings, communication with ancestors, for safety, cultural gatherings, solidarity/togetherness	<p><i>Yang percaya (mistis) pun juga ada cuman kan persentasenya kecil. Dominasi dari pelaku, acara bekakak itu sudah nggak kesitu pikirannya.</i></p> <p>There are also those who believe (mystical), only the percentage is small. The dominance of the perpetrator, the brotherhood event is no longer in his mind</p> <p><i>Itu kan simbolisasi dari wujud rasa syukur kita sudah diberi hasil, baik itu hasil pertanian atau peternakan kita wujudkan dalam bentuk sesaji itu</i></p> <p>It is a symbol of the form of gratitude that we have been given results, whether it is agricultural products or livestock we manifest in the form of offerings</p> <p><i>Ada juga yang mempunyai pendapat ini (makanan sesaji) sebagai berkah. Biar nanti rezeki banyak, biar selalu sehat seperti itu. Kita ini bersatu. Karena semua harus dikerjakan banyak orang.</i></p> <p>There are also those who have this opinion (food offering) as a blessing. So that later there will be a lot of sustenance, so that it will always be healthy like that. We are united. Because everything must be done by many people.</p> <p><i>Iya itu ada makna. Memang kalau sesaji itu, apa yang kita makan, ini kan juga untuk leluhur kita. Untuk keselamatan, nguri-uri budaya juga</i></p> <p>Yes, it has a meaning. Indeed, if the offering, what we eat, is also for our ancestors. For safety, cultural nostalgia is also</p> <p><i>Kalau menurutku sih mungkin ada berkahnya itu mungkin ya.</i></p> <p>If I think there may be a blessing, it may be.</p> <p><i>Hal itu dilestarikan karena ya sebagai wujud rasa syukurnya aja dari masyarakat</i></p> <p>It is preserved because it is a form of gratitude from the community</p> <p><i>Sepertinya hanya rasa syukur</i></p> <p>It seems like just gratitude</p> <p><i>Kalau yang saya tahu untuk istilahnya ngalap berkah. Biar dapat keberkahannya dari yang mereka sajikan, mungkin sudah semacam didoakan</i></p>	<p>Research Subjects 1 (<i>kamituwo/ male</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 2/ dukuh/ male</p> <p>Research Subjects 3 (<i>Bekakak maker/male</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 4 (<i>Cooks and priests / female</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 5 (<i>visitor/ female</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 6 (<i>local community/ female</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 7 (<i>local community/ men</i>)</p> <p>Research Subjects 8 (<i>Visitor/ Male</i>)</p>

		If all I know is the term blessing. In order to get the blessings from what they serve, maybe it has been prayed for	Research Subjects 9 (Visitor/ Male)
		<i>Istilahnya itu mau dibilang sakral ya mungkin iya, saya percaya kalau itu berkah.</i> The term wants to be said sacred, maybe yes, I believe that it is a blessing.	

The shift in the meaning of food in the context of the Saparan Bekakak tradition is related to different aspects of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out), pleasure, sensation, and feeling. Although Saparan Bekakak is an ancient tradition, the development of the times has influenced the way people view and participate in this ritual.

The shift in the meaning of food in the Saparan bekakak tradition can arise because of the existence of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) which makes this tradition interpreted as a cultural tourist attraction. Fear of missing out is a condition in which a person wants to stay connected to what others are doing, feeling worried if he or she does not get the same experience that others have (Wang et al., 2022). People, including tourists, feel the need to attend this ceremony so as not to miss out on a unique experience. The dissemination of information and photos of the ceremony through social media increased the sense of FoMO. This is because FoMO can appear in the form of anxiety when losing experience and feeling the need to stay constantly connected to one's social network (Servidio, 2023) Social media addiction can also increase FoMO (Chi et al., 2022). More complexly, FoMO is a personal tendency and cognition related to the fear of missing out on a particular event (Quaglieri et al., 2022). FoMO also arises due to the fear of losing a satisfying experience and a socialization experience (Zaman et al., 2022).

In addition to its ritual value, Saparan Bekakak is now also seen as an entertaining festival. The addition of modern entertainment elements in the celebration to attract visitors. Relational investment can be built with food

tourism (local food festivals) (Zargar & Farmanesh, 2021). Connected cultural identities, lifestyles, and local themes are packed together in a food festival (Celuch, 2021). Food festivals are packaged in a planned, organized manner and involve many participants by serving local food products (Janiszewska & Ossowska, 2021). Local food festivals can cause differences in the meaning felt by tourists (Richards & Leal Londoño, 2022). Food festivals are usually accompanied by entertainment that can be participated by anyone from various demographic groups that display the relationship between food and daily life (Campoverde-Aguirre et al., 2022). Figure 1 shows the main symbol of Saparan bekakak in the form of a bride and groom made of glutinous rice filled with brown sugar syrup which is symbolized as blood.



Figure 1. The bride and sister of sticky rice and brown sugar syrup

In its development, Saparan Bekakak also developed as a food festival that serves many mountains of food and will be contested at the end of the event as shown in figure 2.



Figure 2. Gunungan makanan (mountain of food) in the tradition of Saparan Bekakak

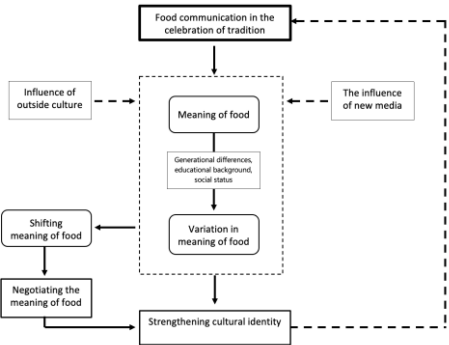
Shifts in meaning can also arise due to the multisensory experience of the ritual, including the scent of incense, the sound of gamelan, and the taste of traditional food. In Java, it is also familiar with the eating ritual called slametan (Newberry, 2007). There is also a feast (thanksgiving ritual) that contains offerings (Lis, 2014). Rituals for Javanese people are considered an effort to balance themselves with the universe and the environment (Puguh et al., 2021). Rituals for Javanese people are considered an effort to balance themselves with the universe and the environment (Rodemeier, 2017). This difference in multi-sensory experience is what affects the shift in the meaning of food, including in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

Variations in the interpretation of meanings related to the Saparan Bekakak tradition depend on the background, experience, and perspective of the individual or group involved. Variations in meaning are found between consumers and food business associations (Barnes et al., 2022). In the context of this research, it is between the makers of offerings and visitors to Saparan Bekakak consisting of local people and visitors from outside the region. Disinformation can occur in cross-cultural communication leading to variations in meaning (Hughes et al., 2021). Variations in the meaning of language can start from the age of preschool children (Melogno et al., 2022). Cultural background shapes individual perceptions (Damrau et al., 2022) which allows for variations in the interpretation of meaning. The technical environment and

personality become factors that influence the background in the process of adaptation of the individual (Hamamoto et al., 2023).

Which allows for variations in the interpretation of meaning. The technical environment and personality become factors that influence the background in the process of adaptation of the individual (Eidsvåg & Rosell, 2021). The assimilation of social experience, the creation of communities, virtual networks and different means of transmission gave rise to the modeling of stratification systems (Zhapparova et al., 2023). This will affect the variation of meaning. Changes in social experiences and actions affect the structure of space (Bognár, 2024) and the potential for variations in meaning. The variability of social interactions within a network can be enhanced by social experiences (Chen & Sokolowski, 2022). Early social experiences with parents influence human actions which then behavior can be influenced by the social environment (Franks et al., 2020). Social experiences can be divided into two categories, namely positive and negative, negative categories can arise due to language barriers and discrimination (Selvitopu, 2020).

This researcher found a food communication model in strengthening the cultural identity of the Saparan Bekakak tradition as a noble tradition of the Indonesia nation. Flowchart 1 shows the model.



Flowchart 1. Food communication model in strengthening cultural identity

The model in chart 1 describes food communication in the celebration of traditions, especially in Saparan bekakak as a noble tradition of the Indonesia nation. Food in the tradition of saparan bekakak has a meaning called the meaning of food. In the analysis carried out, it was found that the meaning of food was influenced by generational differences, educational backgrounds, and social status. These differences give rise to variations in the meaning of food in traditions. In addition, the influence of foreign culture and new media can cause a shift in the meaning of food in tradition such as as a form of thanksgiving, a medium of communication with ancestors, and also a form of social solidarity. This change of meaning allows for the negotiation of meaning with the original meaning of food in the ongoing tradition. Negotiation of the meaning of food in tradition will actually encourage and become a catalyst in the renewal and strengthening of identity.

Conclusion

This study finds a food communication model in strengthening the cultural identity of Saparan Bekakak as a noble tradition of the Indonesian nation. Food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is interpreted as a form of gratitude, blessings, a medium of communication with ancestors, for safety, cultural enlightenment, and strengthening solidarity/togetherness. There is a shift in the meaning of food such as FOMO, pleasure, different sensations and sensations as

well as variations in interpretation in the Saparan Bekakak tradition caused by various backgrounds such as generational differences, educational backgrounds, and social status. The influence of foreign culture and new media encourages the negotiation of the meaning of food in the Saparan tradition which can actually be a catalyst for the renewal and strengthening of cultural identity. The theoretical implications or impacts of this research are in the form of theoretical contributions about food communication that can construct and strengthen cultural identity, in the form of food communication models that can be applied to strengthen cultural identity, especially in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. The limitations of this study are related to the subjectivity of interpretation in the form of the meaning of food symbols in rituals is highly dependent on subjective interpretations, which can differ between researchers and local communities, making it difficult to achieve full objectivity and comparative limitations in the form of the lack of similar studies on food communication in other traditional rituals can limit meaningful comparative analysis.

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