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Preservation of Sundanese Traditional Food: A Consumer-Based Approach to Colenak Deconstruction

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia possesses a wide variety of traditional culinary heritage that reflects local cultural identities, such as colenak from West Java, which consists of grilled peuyeum (fermented cassava) served with a sauce made from palm sugar and grated coconut. However, traditional foods are increasingly threatened by modern food trends and globalization, especially among younger generations. To preserve traditional cuisine, innovations in presentation, such as the deconstruction method, have become essential. This approach combines modern elements with traditional flavors to introduce local cuisine in a more innovative way. This research aims to describe the recipe formulation, the results of the deconstruction, and consumer acceptance testing of colenak deconstruction, using experimental methods to explore the innovation process and to present local culinary heritage through a creative approach.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional cuisine is an integral component of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, reflecting local identities and historical values passed down through generations. According to Pratama (2021), traditional food not only serves as a cultural marker of regional identity but also holds significant economic and social value. In the context of tourism, traditional culinary offerings act as major attractions for both domestic and international visitors (Putra et al., 2020). This aligns with Wijaya et al. (2021), who assert that gastronomic experiences enhance the quality of tourist visits while simultaneously promoting local culture to a broader audience. As one of Indonesia's leading tourism destinations, the city of Bandung has tremendous potential for developing culinary tourism based on local wisdom. Wardhani (2021) states that Bandung is widely recognized for its culinary diversity and creative innovations in presenting traditional dishes, positioning the city as a key player in the sector.

However, one of the key challenges lies in the shifting preferences of younger generations toward more modern, practical, and visually appealing foods. Hasriyani (2021) notes that globalization has impacted Gen Z's interest in traditional food, which is often perceived as outdated in both appearance and branding. A preliminary survey revealed that 55.8% of Gen Z respondents were unfamiliar with colenak, a traditional Sundanese dessert, and 69.2% had never tasted it. Nevertheless, all respondents expressed interest in trying the dish if it were presented in a more modern format. As emphasized by Rachmawati (2022) and Hamidah, S. N., Turgarini, D., & Handyastuti, I. (2019), visual innovation plays a crucial role in increasing younger consumers' acceptance of traditional cuisine.

One contemporary approach to addressing this challenge is the food deconstruction technique, which reimagines traditional dishes by altering their presentation while preserving their original flavor profile (Smith, 2018; Basuki, E. A., & Sari, I. R., 2024). A five-star hotel in Bandung City (Hotel X) has successfully implemented this technique through its "Colenak Phoenix" menu, a reinterpretation of colenak presented as Ferrero Rocher-style balls filled with fermented cassava (peuyeum), sweet coconut mixture (enten), and chocolate. Such innovations not only expand the market for traditional foods but also help preserve local culinary heritage by adapting it to contemporary tastes (Novita & Wijaya, 2021; Meghini, 2021; Fusté-Forné, F., & Mundet i Cerdan, L., 2021).

In broader terms, deconstruction aligns with the concept of gastronomic adaptation, where cultural foods are preserved by integrating modern gastronomic techniques. As noted by Jones & Jenkins (2020), the reinvention of traditional dishes in fine-dining and hospitality settings can serve as a strategic response to cultural fading, provided it retains the essence of the original dish. Therefore, the deconstruction of colenak serves not only as a culinary innovation but also as a form of cultural resilience in a rapidly globalizing food environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Preservation

Preservation is an effort to maintain the continuity of a value, tradition, or heritage so that it does not disappear over time. In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, this term originates from the word lestari, which means permanent and unchanging. Prasetyo et al. (2022) emphasize that preservation includes the protection of cultural elements, the environment, and valuable objects to prevent them from extinction. Some research adds that cultural preservation aims to maintain societal values and traditions so that they remain relevant for future generations, while another highlights the importance of sustainable management to balance preservation.

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2.2 Traditional Food

Traditional food is part of a cultural heritage that reflects the identity, history, and way of life of a community (Manek, S., & Rato, Y. I.,2024). Based on local ingredients and distinctive processing techniques such as fermentation or smoking, these foods are passed down through generations and are closely linked to cultural traditions and rituals (Zhao & Tan, 2020). Beyond their cultural value, traditional foods also hold economic potential, particularly within the tourism sector that emphasizes authentic culinary experiences (Gastron & Elway, 2019). However, some traditional foods are endangered or increasingly being abandoned by communities (Murdijati, 2017), making their preservation crucial. This preservation involves aspects of sustainability, authenticity, and cultural meaning (Adinugraha, H. H., & Sasongko, G., 2023) and requires support through innovation to remain relevant amidst changing times. Therefore, a modern approach that still respects traditional values serves as an important strategy for maintaining the existence of traditional foods.

2.3 Food Deconstruction

Food deconstruction is a culinary technique that recreates a dish by separating its elements of flavor, texture, and form without altering its original taste (Guerrero, L., Claret, A., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., & Enderli, G., 2021). This technique has evolved under the influence of molecular gastronomy and is used as an innovative approach that combines art, science, and modern culinary aesthetics (Putra & Sari, 2022). Its primary aim is to provide a unique dining experience while bridging the taste preferences of older and younger generations, including Millennials and Gen Z. According to Lee and Wall (2022), key indicators of deconstruction include understanding the food matrix, analyzing component functions, applying molecular approaches, food re-engineering, and assessing its impact on nutrition and health. Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman (2016) add that deconstruction also involves analyzing physical and chemical processes, exploring modern processing techniques such as spherification and sous vide, and creating new sensory experiences. Meanwhile, Rodrigues, Machín, Ares, and Antúnez (2021) emphasize the separation and reconstruction of food elements, the exploration of textures using modern technologies such as liquid nitrogen, and the preservation of cultural values in presentation.

In terms of its characteristics, food deconstruction is marked by innovative presentation, the use of molecular technology, multisensory dining experiences, and respect for tradition presented with a contemporary touch (Adrià, 2006). Spence (2020) highlights that deconstruction also considers visual elements, sound, aroma, and the context of presentation, all of which can influence flavor perception and enrich the overall dining experience.

3. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research method, utilizing organoleptic testing and an experimental design to examine the effects of treatment under controlled conditions (Sugiyono, 2020). The research involved sensory evaluation of colenak innovation through the deconstruction technique by 100 respondents. The aim was to identify differences and compare consumer perceptions throughout the experimentation process.

The object of the study focused on the preservation of colenak using deconstruction techniques and measuring consumer acceptance through organoleptic assessment (Waysima & Adawiyah, 2010). The research subjects consisted of 100 individuals who tasted the deconstructed colenak to evaluate its sensory acceptance (Sugiyono, 2019). The population included guests of Hotel X who had previously tried the deconstructed version of colenak. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who fit the research criteria (Sugiyono, 2020).

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The total sample size of 100 hotel guests aligns with recommendations by Meilgaard et al. (2020) for consumer acceptance testing, and is considered adequate to yield valid and reliable data. According to Stone and Sidel (2004), a minimum of 75–100 panelists is generally appropriate for hedonic testing when the goal is to assess product preference or acceptance under practical consumer conditions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

The deconstruction of colenak represents a culinary innovation that retains the original taste of the traditional Sundanese dessert while offering a modern and visually appealing presentation, especially targeted at younger generations and tourists. The recipe maintains the core ingredients, fermented cassava (tape singkong), grated coconut, and palm sugar, while incorporating a chocolate coating to create a textural contrast and enhance flavor complexity. This innovation aims to preserve traditional cuisine through a contemporary approach (Darwis, R.,2021; Widyastuti, 2022). The experimental trials demonstrated that the dish's attractiveness increased without compromising its original essence.

The following outlines the technical stages of colenak deconstruction as implemented at Hotel X.

Preparation Stage →	In the initial stage of the colenak deconstruction process at Hotel X, high-quality ingredients such as fermented cassava, grated coconut, palm sugar, jackfruit, and pandan leaves were prepared to ensure the flavor profile and consistency of the final dish.
Processing Stage →	1. Weighing and Grilling the Fermented Cassava Each portion of fermented cassava was weighed at 100 grams to maintain consistency in flavor balance, ease of processing, and portion uniformity. The measured tape was then grilled on a pan with margarine until golden brown, creating a crispy outer texture while keeping the inside soft and tender. 2. Preparation of Enten (Sweet Coconut Filling) Palm sugar was melted until fully dissolved, then grated coconut, jackfruit slices, and pandan leaves were added. The mixture was cooked over low heat until the coconut absorbed the sugar and reached a slightly dry but still moist texture. The jackfruit contributed natural sweetness, a distinctive aroma, and enhanced the overall texture of the filling. Once cooked, the enten was allowed to cool down before being used as the core filling in the deconstructed colenak.

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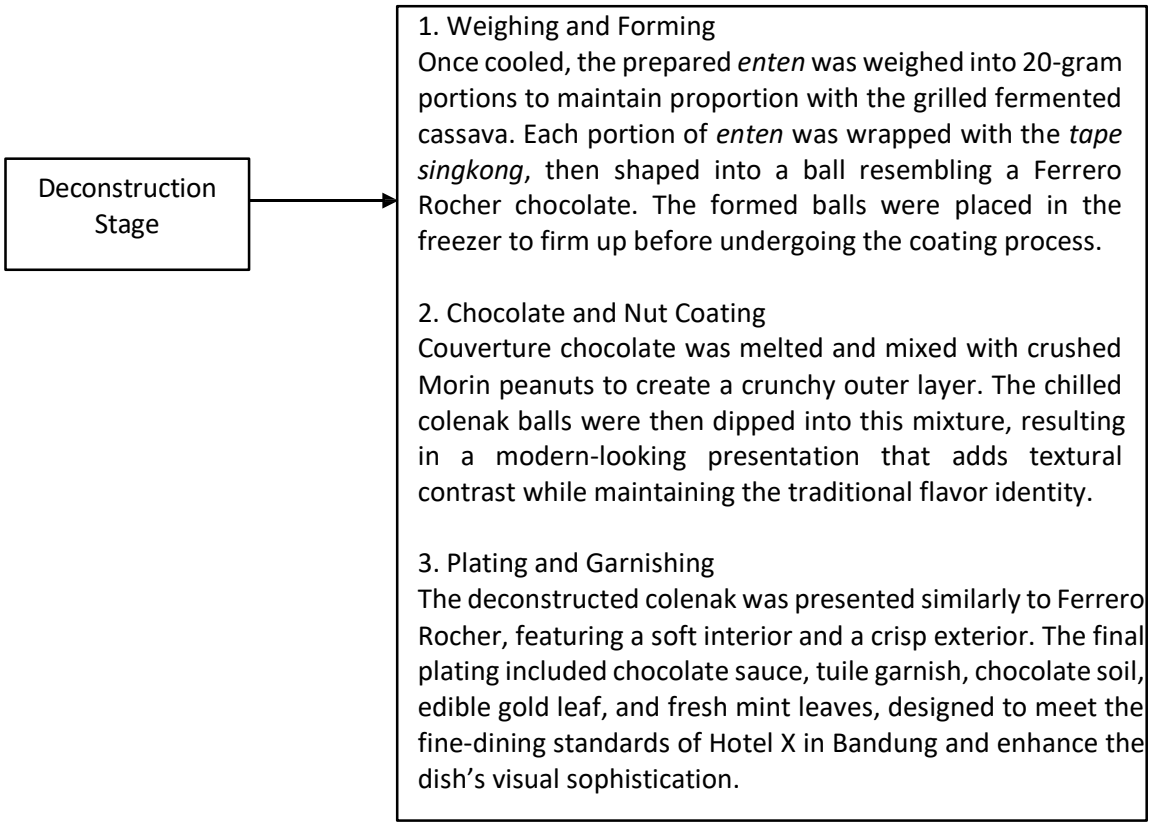

Figure 1. Colenak Deconstruction Process

The deconstruction process involved an in-depth analysis of each component to determine the most effective way to modify its presentation. This included adjustments in texture, form, and plating methods, while maintaining the distinctive taste and aroma that define Colenak.

Figure 2. Traditional Colenak
Source: www.liputan6.com

Figure 3. Colenak Phoenix
Source: Author (2025)

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4.2. Discussion

Based on the panelists' evaluations of the deconstructed colenak, several findings emerged concerning taste, color, texture, and appearance. In terms of taste, the average rating of the deconstructed version was significantly higher than that of the traditional colenak. The highest preference score for the taste of deconstructed colenak reached 3.89, while the traditional version received a score of 3.14.

Table 1. Comparison of Taste Preference Scores Between Deconstructed Colenak (Colenak Phoenix) and Traditional Colenak.

Product	Average preference score for taste
Colenak Phoenix	3,89
Traditional Colenak	3,14

Source: Author (2025)

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the taste characteristics of Colenak Phoenix were preferred over those of traditional Colenak. In terms of texture, the deconstructed colenak received an average rating of 3.92, significantly higher than the traditional version's 2.73.

Table 2. Comparison of Texture Preference Scores Between Deconstructed Colenak (Colenak Phoenix) and Traditional Colenak

Product	Average preference score for Texture
Colenak Phoenix	3,92
Traditional Colenak	2,73

Source: Author (2025)

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the texture characteristics of Colenak Phoenix were more favored than those of traditional colenak. In terms of aroma, the average score for the deconstructed colenak (Colenak Phoenix) was 3.76, which was higher than the score for the traditional version, which averaged 3.00.

Table 3. Comparison of Aroma Preference Scores Between Deconstructed Colenak (Colenak Phoenix) and Traditional Colenak

Product	Average preference score for Aroma
Colenak Phoenix	3,76
Traditional Colenak	3,0

Source: Author (2025)

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the aroma characteristics of Colenak Phoenix were more preferred than those of traditional colenak. Furthermore, in terms of appearance, the deconstructed colenak (Colenak Phoenix) received a higher average score of 4.01, compared to 2.40 for the traditional version.

Table 4. Comparison of Apperance Preference Scores Between Deconstructed Colenak (Colenak Phoenix) and Traditional Colenak

Product	Average preference score for Apperance
Colenak Phoenix	4,01
Traditional Colenak	2,4

Source: Author (2025)

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the appearance characteristics of Colenak Phoenix were more preferred compared to the traditional Colenak.

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4.3. Consumer Acceptance Test Results

An assumption test was conducted using a normality test to determine whether to apply the independent t-test or the Mann-Whitney U test. If the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05, the data are considered normally distributed, and the independent t-test can be used. Conversely, if the Sig. value is less than 0.05, the data are not normally distributed, and the Mann-Whitney U test is applied.

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used for assessing normality, as the sample size exceeded 50 participants. The results of the normality test are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Normality Test

Variable	Sig.	Decision
Traditional Colenak	0.000	Not Normally Distributed
Colenak Phoenix	0.000	Not Normally Distributed

Source: Author (2025)

Based on the table above, it can be observed that the traditional colenak variable had a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000, while the Colenak Phoenix variable also showed a Sig. value of 0.000. Since both variables had Sig. < 0.05, it can be concluded that the data were not normally distributed. In this study, the homogeneity test was conducted using Levene's test of variance. The decision rule is as follows: if the Sig. value is less than 0.05, the two groups are considered to have different variances (heterogeneous). Conversely, if the Sig. value is greater than 0.05, the two groups are considered to have equal variances (homogeneous).

Table 6. Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
0.002	1	208	0.968

Source: Author (2025)

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the significance value is 0.968, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are homogeneous. However, despite the data being homogeneous, they are not normally distributed. Therefore, the appropriate statistical test to analyze the differences in consumer preference between traditional colenak and Colenak Phoenix is the Mann-Whitney U test.

The following are the hypotheses and decision criteria for the Mann–Whitney U test:

a. Hypotheses:

H_o: There is no significant difference in consumer preference between traditional colenak and Colenak Phoenix.

H_1: There is a significant difference in consumer preference between traditional colenak and Colenak Phoenix.

b. Decision Criteria:

If the Sig. value < 0.05, then H_o is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

If the Sig. value > 0.05, then H_o is accepted and H_1 is rejected.

Based on the data analysis performed using Mann–Whitney U test with the aid of SPSS version 26, the following results were obtained:

Table 7. Mann–Whitney U Test

Variable	Traditional Colenak (Mean ± SD)	Colenak Phoenix (Mean ± SD)	Sig.
Consumer Acceptance	2.816 ± 0.788	3.876 ± 0.887	0.000

Source: Author (2025)

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This study examines the application of the deconstruction technique to colenak, a traditional Sundanese dessert, as a strategy to preserve its authentic flavor and cultural value while adapting its appearance to appeal to younger generations. The innovation transformed colenak into bite-sized dessert balls resembling Ferrero Rocher, while retaining its essential ingredients, fermented cassava, grated coconut, and palm sugar. Interviews with culinary experts revealed that deconstruction serves as an innovative culinary approach that bridges tradition and modernity. It preserves the authentic taste while enhancing visual appeal, which is especially important in the era of social-media-driven dining experiences.

One of the main challenges identified was maintaining the delicate balance between innovation and authenticity, which was addressed through rigorous experimentation and research. The deconstructed colenak has proven to be well-received by consumers, particularly among younger demographics and tourists, and has sustained consistent sales for nearly seven years at Hotel X in Bandung. This positive reception underscores the effectiveness of culinary innovation in maintaining the relevance of traditional foods amidst evolving food trends (Nabila, S. A., et al, 2022; Nabilah, G., 2022).

Moreover, this research reinforces that the deconstruction approach not only contributes to cultural preservation but also provides strategic value for the hospitality industry. By integrating traditional elements with contemporary presentation, Colenak Phoenix has strengthened the hotel's brand image, enhanced customer loyalty, and opened up opportunities for positioning Colenak as a culinary icon representing Sundanese heritage on a broader scale.

This aligns with previous findings by Adrià (2006) and Spence (2020), who argue that deconstructivist cuisine fosters a multisensory dining experience, enhancing emotional connection and storytelling around food. Similarly, Jones and Jenkins (2020) emphasize that reinterpretation of heritage cuisine within the context of fine dining can elevate both cultural value and market appeal. In this case, the transformation of colenak has served as a model for how gastronomic innovation can revitalize traditional foods and ensure their sustainability in a modern culinary landscape.

5. CONCLUSION

The deconstruction of colenak represents a successful culinary innovation that harmoniously combines traditional values with a modern approach, resulting in a dish that not only preserves the original flavors of fermented cassava, grated coconut, and palm sugar, but is also visually appealing and relevant to the tastes of younger generations and tourists. The addition of elements such as chocolate and contemporary plating techniques has enhanced flavor complexity, texture, aroma, and overall presentation.

Panelist evaluations consistently showed higher preference scores for the deconstructed colenak compared to its traditional counterpart across all sensory aspects. These findings were statistically confirmed by the Mann–Whitney U test, which yielded a significance value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant difference in consumer preference.

Strategically, the deconstructed colenak successfully meets the demands of today's culinary market, which prioritizes uniqueness, aesthetics, and cultural meaning. Support from social media, the rise of culinary tourism, and growing awareness of cultural preservation have further strengthened its position as a modern dish rooted in Sundanese culinary heritage.

Therefore, the innovation of deconstructed colenak has not only proven to be successful from both sensory and commercial perspectives but also contributes meaningfully to the preservation of traditional cuisine through an adaptive and forward-looking gastronomic strategy.

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