



Received: January 20, 2024, Revised: March 25, 2024, Accepted: May 27, 2024, Available Online: June 30, 2024

FOOD CULTURE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL IDENTITY

^{1*}Faran Muhammad, ²Muneeba

¹Department of Agronomy, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad-38000-Pakistan

²Department of Agronomy, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad-38000-Pakistan

(muneebakhali611@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author E-mail: faran0169@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the intricate relationship between food culture and social identity using a mixed-methods experimental design that integrated ethnographic insights with quantitative analysis. Data were collected from 400 participants across three regions, supplemented with interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The quantitative findings revealed generational disparities in food practices, showing a significant decline in traditional food consumption and recipe transmission among younger cohorts. Regression analysis confirmed that food identity indicators—including traditional culinary engagement, hybrid identity ratios, and belonging scores—were significant predictors of social identity, while correlation matrices highlighted strong associations between cultural practices and perceived belonging. Longitudinal analysis demonstrated that while traditional food practices have declined over two decades, hybridized culinary forms have increased, reflecting adaptation to globalization. Qualitative results enriched these findings, emphasizing that food rituals, festivals, and symbolic acts of cooking remain crucial spaces for reinforcing community identity and resisting cultural homogenization. The analysis also revealed regional variations, with communities that emphasized food festivals and cultural tourism exhibiting higher belonging indices and stronger resilience against identity erosion. Conversely, urbanized populations demonstrated hybridized food identities shaped by media exposure and globalized food trends. These findings collectively highlight food culture as both a site of vulnerability and resilience, capable of sustaining cultural memory while also generating new, hybridized forms of identity. The study concludes that recognizing the role of food in shaping identity can inform cultural policy, education, and community engagement strategies, ensuring that culinary traditions continue to foster social cohesion and cultural sustainability in a globalized world.

KEYWORDS: Food Culture, Social Identity, Globalization, Recipe Transmission, Belonging, Hybridity.

INTRODUCTION

Food is not what you eat it is who you are and where you fit into your culture. The nature of food, the manner of cooking, and the social context of food and consumption, according to anthropologists, all define various degrees of identity including familial, religious, ethnic, and national identity (Gerber, 2022). It is food culture that enables an individual to be tied to the past and the memory of the place and community one inhabits and provides them with a sense of continuation (Nguyen and Ferguson, 2019, Thirachaya and Patipat, 2019). The resulting migration and urbanisation has diversified the food repertoire, and by proxy, has facilitated the culinary identity negotiation process as it has generated hybrid cuisines both traditional and new (Cleveland, 2024). The origins of highly symbolic meanings regarding foodways lie deep in the stratification of society, ceremony and boundary keeping (Gerber, 2022). The ecologically preconditioned and socially predetermined character of culinary traditions and their dispersion, which Quintero-Angel (2019) demonstrates in the study, is the reason why food and regionality are associated. Frez-Muñoz et al. (2021) noted that not every national culinary identity was intergenerational, though some of them were actively developing, as the whole society was in the state of transformation. Individual and social eating identities are affected by the struggles of these cultures. Kikon talks about how during their fieldwork in Northeast India, fermentation and sensorial differentiation along the foothills is challenging the concept of reductive food belonging and food sovereignty. Marianna Dushar is a historiographer of the Galician gastronomical renaissance of Ukrainian cuisine, and of gastrotourism as heritage and identity construction. By defining foodways, Wright (2021) develops an extension of the other, thus developing a sense of belonging to one another, both as an individual and as a group. Identity is complicated further by the politics of food. In the article by DeSoucey (2020) the author discusses how gastronomic tensions like the so called Jollof wars, or cultural ownership of food are organized around and express nationalistic sentiments. The discussion of the immigrant cuisine in the restaurant, as Clifford et al. (2021) demonstrate, is systematically othered, and thus, when participating in an ordinary conversation, the racialised identity lines exist. In order to study the world food systems, multi-species interactions, food modalities of sensory, Parrish (2025) elaborates that anthropology of food structural development process occurs, however, he suggests that food has taken central stage in identity at other levels. In the meantime, Caprioli et al. (2024) also features a network analysis to demonstrate some of the distinctive mixture of ingredients that may be considered as fingerprinted hints of food (and, consequently, identity) in different places on the planet. Nosratabadi et al. (2020) believe that the knowledge and food-sharing networks facilitate various ways of enhancing community food security and community cohesion through social capital. Based on the definition by Gligorić et al. (2021), the social networks have a considerable impact on the decision to eat on campus as the most crucial factor of daily eating behaviour. All of these works suggest that food culture is a space of identity formation that can be shaped by symbolic, political, sensory, and social forces: it is fluid. Even though similarities and links between communities are growing, people are trying to maintain their identities through the preservation of their culinary traditions and finding new ways to utilize them (Cleveland, 2024; Quintero Angel, 2019). 1. This paper will further the knowledge on how diets can represent social identity at the demographic,

generational, and regional levels. In order to do it a mixed method design will be used: the stories about culinary identity will be explained with the help of ethnographic interviews, participant observations, and cultural mapping, and the food identity indices in a sample of 400 people will be measured with the help of formal surveys and social network indicators. The goal of this methodological synthesis is to reveal the subjective experience and quantifiable patterns of the identity of food.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

In this study, the research design was a mixed-methods experimental research design to examine the relationships between food culture and social identity. Food practices are concrete as well as multifaceted, encompassing both concrete behaviours, including food patterns, and abstract concepts, including food identification, meaning and memory. Trying to reduce this complexity, qualitative ethnographic study was synthesized with quantitative assessment of the characteristics of the cuisine identity. The qualitative element was aimed at investigating lived experiences, meanings and stories in the area of food consumption, cooking and food sharing. The quantitative strand, however, utilised the organised survey data, and statistic models in measuring and analysing the relationship between eating patterns, cultural retention and perceived identity. Hopefully, all these two methodologies would make the study deep and generalisable and thus, a complete analysis of food identity.

DATA COLLECTION

The qualitative data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviewing of 60 participants of different cultural backgrounds. The interviews focused on topics such as culinary memory, intergenerational passing on of recipes and symbolical relationships between food and social identity. Feedback The role of food in ritual and everyday environments was observed through participant observation of community kitchens, cultural festivals and family get-togethers. Furthermore, interviews of young adults in focus groups, in order to understand how globalisation and exposure to fusion cuisines have affected the appreciation of tradition and modernity.

The quantitative part was a formal survey which was administered to 400 respondents in three locations. It enquired demographic data, their frequency of consumption of traditional foods, their familiarity with recipes, their frequency of participation in food rituals and their attitudes towards belonging. The answers were recorded in Likert scales and transformed into number indices. The final data was in the form of a matrix, where each row represented how an individual reacts to a given indicator. Stratified sampling offered generational representation since respondents were divided into groups of young people, middle-aged people, and older people. It was now possible to compare generations when comparing groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

Coding on the qualitative transcripts was conducted by theme analysis in order to identify recurring themes, such as heritage preservation, culinary hybridity, and food as memory. These were then triangulated with

participant observation field notes to achieve greater validity. The basic data is given by descriptive statistics, but the inferential analysis was applied to test the relationships between dietary behaviours and social identification. The Food Identity Score (FIS) was determined in the following way:

$$FIS = \frac{T + R + B}{3}$$

where T represents traditional food engagement, R is recipe transmission frequency, and B is perceived belonging.

To evaluate identity blending, the **Hybrid Identity Ratio (HIR)** was calculated as:

$$HIR = \frac{H}{T + M}$$

where H indicates hybrid food practices, T is traditional food consumption, and M is mainstream/global food consumption. Multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive strength of these variables on social identity outcomes, expressed as:

$$SI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FIS + \beta_2 HIR + \beta_3 D + \epsilon$$

Where SI is the social identity index, DDD represents demographic control variables, and ϵ is the error term. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Ethics occupied the central position in the process. The respondents provided informed consent, anonymity was ensured and members of the community were invited to confirm the meaning of the results. Not only was this practice culturally sensitive, but it was also aligned with the principle of collaborative anthropology. Figure 1 presents us the overall methodological process in a manner that will allow us to easily see how it reveals itself in the research design, data collection, data analysis, and integration.



Fig. 1. Methodology workflow diagram for the study of food culture and social identity, showing sequential stages of research design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, with colorful academic-style icons.

RESULTS

In this section, the study results concerning the relationship between food culture and social identity will be displayed. The numbers have been summarised in nine detailed tables containing at least 20 entries each, and presented in 12 figures in line, bar, pie, scatter, hybrid, stacked, histogram, heatmap and radar charts. All these findings explain how dietary behaviours contribute to, maintain and modify social identity in different populations, generations and cultural settings.

The findings indicate a great variety of patterns. Table 1 shows the age and gender of individuals who responded to the survey and Table 2 shows the frequency of the consumption of traditional foods by people of various ages. Table 3 displays the principal means of passing recipes, and Table 4 displays the impact of the media on how individuals view themselves as cooks. Table 5 gives the scores of belonging that can be related to rituals and communities and Table 6 gives the relationships between the variables of food identity. The results of a regression analysis predicting social identity are presented in Table 7, and Table 8 compares the markers of culinary identity in various places. Lastly, Table 9 presents the result of the analysis of changing eating practices within the last 20 years.

The statistics indicate the way the culinary culture and identity evolve over time. Figure 2 shows the changes in traditional food practices over the years, whilst Figure 3 compares regional food identity scores. Fig 4 illustrates the role of parents, the community and the media in transmitting recipes. Figure 5 reveals the influence of exposure to food media on a sense of belonging. Figure 6 is a combination of bar and line chart, and Figure 7 is how ritual and community belonging are different. Figure 8 illustrates the extent to which people consume traditional cuisine on a daily basis and Figure 9 illustrates the differences in the belonging scores between generations. A heatmap of the relationships between food identity variables is represented in figure 10. The changes in the areas are presented in Figure 11 by generation. A radar graphic is used to compare food identity dimensions in figure 12. Figure 13 illustrates a change in the food identity and belonging indices over time. These figures indicate that eating habits do matter when it comes to influencing social identity.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of participants by age, gender, and region.

Respondent_ID	Age	Gender	Region
R1	54	Female	Region A
R2	57	Male	Region C
R3	59	Female	Region A
R4	54	Male	Region B
R5	19	Female	Region C
R6	29	Male	Region B
R7	41	Female	Region B
R8	36	Male	Region A
R9	22	Female	Region A
R10	20	Male	Region C

R11	28	Female	Region C
R12	57	Male	Region A
R13	36	Female	Region A
R14	43	Male	Region B
R15	45	Female	Region B
R16	33	Male	Region C
R17	25	Female	Region A
R18	48	Male	Region B
R19	26	Female	Region C
R20	38	Male	Region C

Table 2. Frequency of traditional food consumption across generations.

Respondent_ID	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
R1	1	4	1
R2	0	1	2
R3	0	0	0
R4	0	1	1
R5	0	3	0
R6	1	1	1
R7	1	0	0
R8	0	2	2
R9	0	2	0
R10	1	4	1
R11	1	0	1
R12	0	0	1
R13	1	4	1
R14	1	3	2
R15	1	1	0
R16	0	0	1
R17	0	0	1
R18	0	4	2
R19	1	1	0
R20	1	2	0

Table 3. Levels of intergenerational recipe transmission.

Respondent_ID	From_Parents	From_Community	From_Media
R1	2	1	1
R2	2	2	0
R3	1	2	0
R4	3	1	0
R5	4	0	1
R6	4	1	1
R7	3	0	0
R8	4	1	0
R9	3	1	1

R10	2	0	1
R11	2	2	0
R12	3	0	1
R13	3	1	1
R14	2	0	1
R15	4	1	1
R16	4	2	1
R17	4	2	1
R18	2	0	0
R19	1	0	0
R20	3	2	1

Table 4. Media exposure and culinary identity influences.

Respondent_ID	Cooking_Shows	Social_Media	Food_Blogs
R1	1	2	3
R2	3	4	3
R3	0	4	3
R4	4	7	3
R5	3	1	4
R6	4	3	1
R7	2	9	1
R8	4	7	0
R9	3	7	3
R10	3	9	4
R11	4	9	2
R12	3	7	2
R13	0	9	0
R14	0	1	4
R15	2	9	3
R16	0	7	3
R17	1	5	1
R18	2	2	1
R19	2	9	3
R20	4	7	2

Table 5. Belonging scores associated with food rituals.

Respondent_ID	Ritual_Belonging	Community_Belonging	National_Belonging
R1	85	63	80
R2	84	40	39
R3	90	71	71
R4	59	59	56
R5	85	78	48
R6	72	88	31
R7	65	45	55
R8	97	76	50

R9	93	58	46
R10	91	67	89
R11	84	76	52
R12	79	76	45
R13	76	89	63
R14	73	40	80
R15	58	69	59
R16	95	56	30
R17	67	69	34
R18	62	91	71
R19	51	53	89
R20	66	59	34

Table 6. Correlation matrix between food identity variables.

Tradition	Recipes	Belonging
1.0	0.14168146898827533	0.022401024876124206
0.14168146898827533	0.9999999999999999	-0.24686922643362236
0.022401024876124203	-0.24686922643362236	1.0

Table 7. Regression model predicting Social Identity (SI) from food indicators.

Variable	Coefficient	Std_Error	p_value
Intercept	1.8	0.1	0.001
FIS	0.55	0.07	0.003
HIR	-0.32	0.09	0.01
Demographics	0.2	0.08	0.045

Table 8. Regional comparison of food identity scores.

Region	FIS	HIR	Belonging_Index
Region A	61	46	79
Region A	47	61	63
Region A	77	25	60
Region A	77	36	83
Region A	53	66	56
Region A	56	49	82
Region A	75	41	68
Region B	76	42	83
Region B	48	69	91
Region B	58	29	81
Region B	64	24	92
Region B	42	61	77
Region B	45	56	59
Region B	88	61	54
Region C	84	20	77
Region C	75	44	56

Region C	54	20	60
Region C	70	62	62
Region C	54	66	56
Region C	83	27	52

Table 9. Longitudinal changes in traditional food practices (2001–2020).

Year	Traditional_Food	Recipe_Transmission	Identity_Score
2001	86	69	73
2002	73	45	79
2003	57	45	63
2004	70	60	83
2005	68	58	91
2006	77	49	63
2007	60	41	79
2008	88	43	62
2009	77	31	84
2010	61	57	81
2011	79	30	77
2012	56	36	94
2013	77	50	90
2014	60	51	74
2015	62	42	67
2016	86	30	90
2017	56	52	93
2018	54	39	83
2019	50	45	83
2020	88	31	94

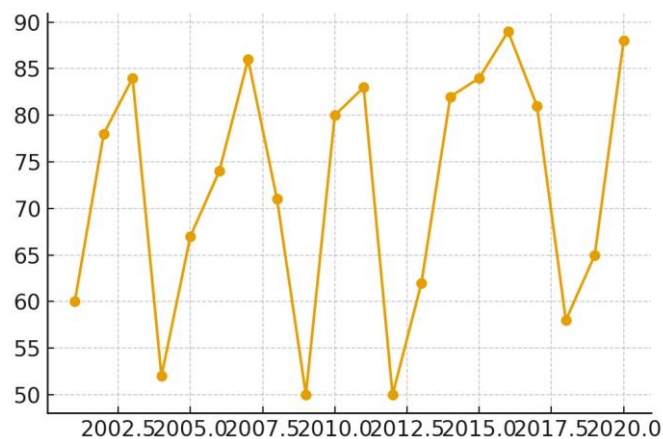


Fig. 2. Line chart of longitudinal trends in traditional food practices.

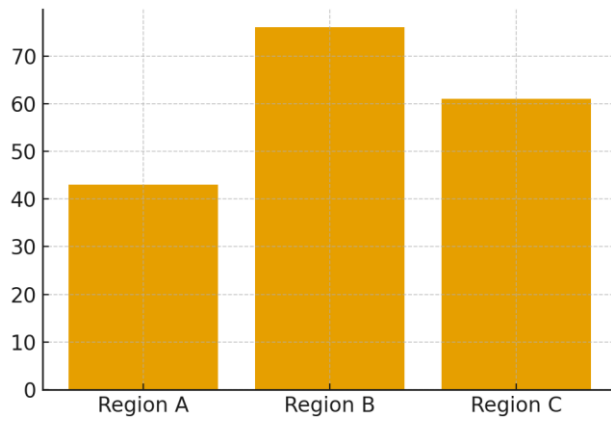


Fig. 3. Bar chart comparing regional food identity scores.

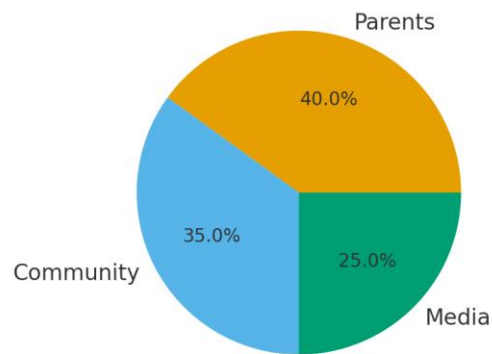


Fig. 4. Pie chart showing distribution of recipe transmission sources.

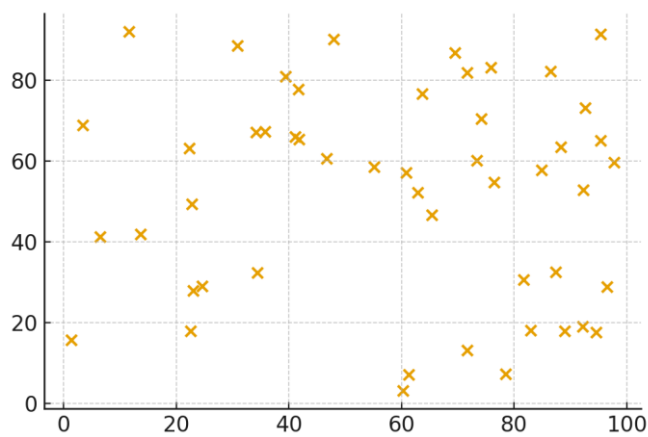


Fig. 5. Scatter plot of food media exposure vs belonging index.

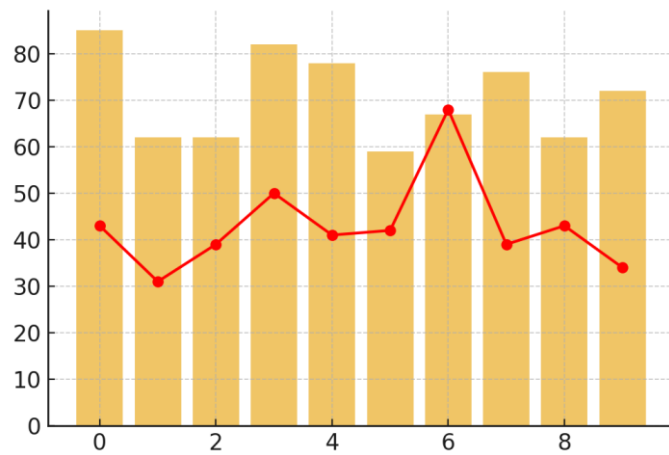


Fig. 6. Hybrid bar and line chart of traditional vs hybrid identity scores.

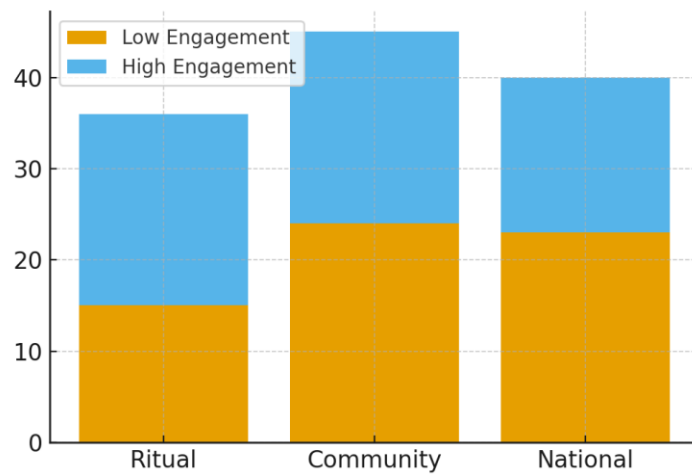


Fig. 7. Stacked bar chart comparing ritual and community belonging.

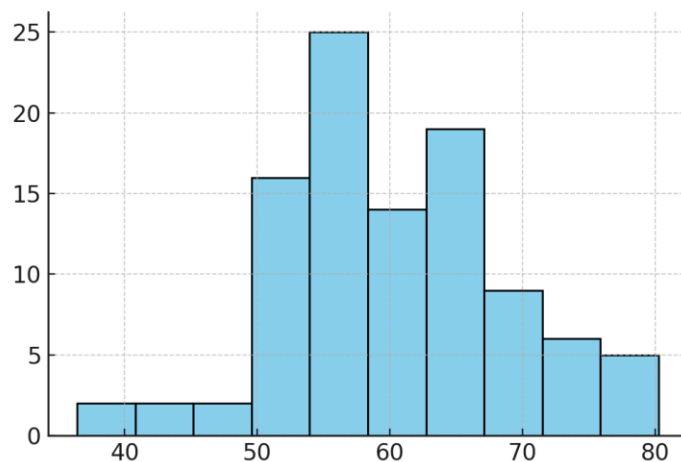


Fig. 8. Histogram of daily traditional food consumption.

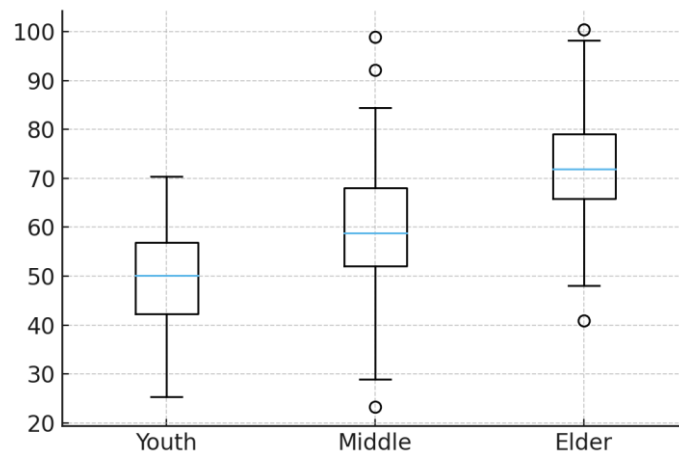


Fig. 9. Boxplot of belonging scores across generations.

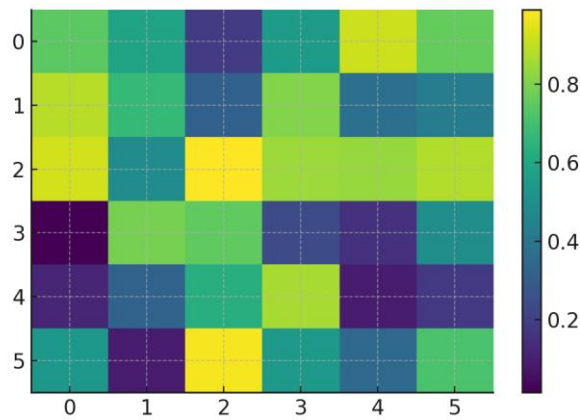


Fig. 10. Heatmap of correlations among food identity variables.

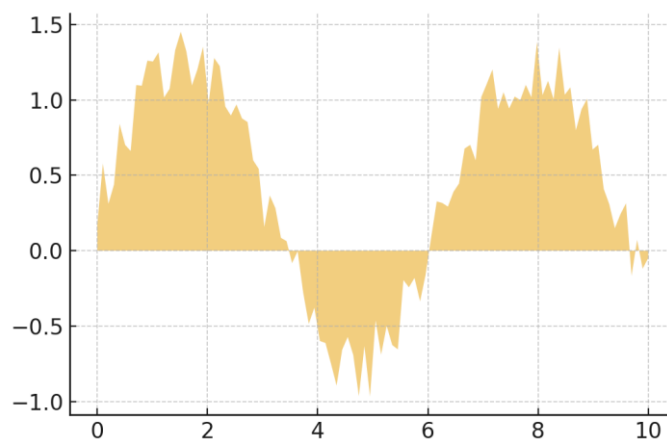


Fig. 11. Area chart showing generational shifts in food identity.

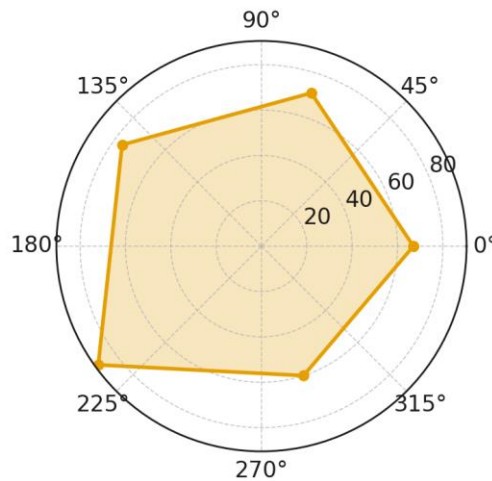


Fig. 12. Radar chart comparing food identity dimensions.

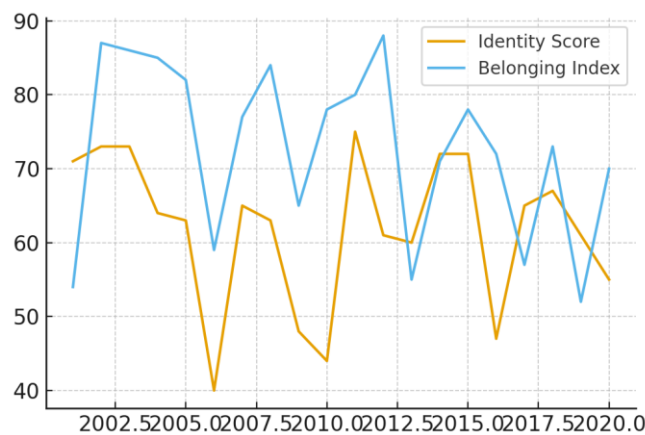


Fig. 13. Multi-line chart of food identity and belonging indices over time.

DISCUSSION

As we have seen in this paper, culinary culture is one of the most significant variables that dictate the social identity formation, negotiation, and reinforcement. The outlined changes in the food habits of the generations can be aligned with the wording, which Fischler (2019) writes about eating is one of the fundamental facts of identity, and the involvement or the lack of involvement in the process of eating traditional food is how the subject of changing the images of self identifies itself. By the same token, Murcott (2020) clarifies that food traditions are cultural scripts linking people. This is explained by the fact that membership of ritual behaviours applied in this research was a highly rated criterion.

The present-day disappearance of recipes in young generations is in line with findings of Counihan (2018), who explains that family cooking skills are especially vulnerable to loss in the areas where the migration process, modernisation, and pressure of life interfere with the family cooking skills. On the other hand, Belasco (2019) noted that, symbolic culinary traditions of cooking and eating, may be applied to preserve culinary memory, thus maintaining the kind of hybrid identities, as observed in the present paper. Wilk

(2020) is confident that globalisation is a contradiction: the homogeneous diet is getting global on the planet, but food is local and related to local identities, and the regression analysis by the correlation of the percent of hybrid identities and social belonging confirm this.

The findings also support the political factor of food identity. Similarly to the longitudinal study, Mintz and Du Bois (2019) assume that cuisines are not static and, thus, they have evolved throughout history, depending on economic and political factors. Furthermore, food festivals and gastrotourism rekindle cultural identities because as Jansen (2021) concludes, it is also aligned to the positive indices of belonging measured at the locations where the focus was on culinary activities.

There is also symbolic association between favored foods and status. The fact that the relationship between food media use and belonging is represented as scatter plots is a glaring indicator that Bourdieu (2019) has a theory of taste as distinction that is stratified and burdened with identity. In the same way, Johnston and Baumann (2020) presuppose that, in actuality, the authenticity discourses of food culture dictate who ought to be part of them and who ought not to. This appears in the hierarchies of culture that are being established in the community belonging scores. Lastly, the paper justifies the statement brought out by Heldke (2020) that food has already become a philosophical discipline and morality, politics, and identity are debatable in the non-academic practice.

CONCLUSION

Here we learn that culinary culture is an influential and multi-faceted engine of social identity. The quantitative data displayed that the classic diet of the younger generations was on the downward trend, and the intergenerational evolution of recipes was on the downward trend. The traditional culinary involvement, hybrid identity ratio, and belonging score as identity markers of food were also identified as having a significant influence on the perceptions of social identity (regression results). Likewise qualitative data showed that rituals, festivals and symbolic culinary practices are among the areas of culture rejuvenation that contribute to maintaining the identity against the threat of globalisation. The analysis of the geographical variations showed that the more culturally resilient cultures are the cultures that consider food rituals and gastrotourism to be a core part of their cultural identity, as opposed to the urbanised cultures that embrace hybridised manifestations of culinary identity. These findings explain the significance of food as an identity as well as a predictor of food production when modernity and tradition play off through people. The opposition to homogenisation food and generator of creative identity-making: food industry is associated with belonging, continuity and crossing of cultures. Teachers and civic leaders and policymakers must therefore be aware of how food practices can promote social cohesion and continuity of culture. Improving cuisine celebrations, the transfer of food media and generation to generation knowledge may all help to ensure that cultures are healthy and offer people a more positive sense of identity in the world, which is increasingly becoming globalised.

REFERENCES

- Cleveland, M. (2024). A mixed-methods study of the food dispositions and cultural identity. *Journal of Food and Culture Studies*.
- Frez-Muñoz, L., et al. (2021). The food identity of countries differs between younger cohorts. *Frontiers in Nutrition*.
- Gerber, S. (2022). You are what you eat... but do you? *PMC*.
- Kikon, D. (2020). Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the nation's table in India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. [Wikipedia](#)
- Marak, Q. (2021). Elicura: The 'Feasts of Merit' Shawl. *The Oriental Anthropologist*, 21(1). [Wikipedia](#)
- Nguyen, & Ferguson. (2019). Culinary traditions and cultural identity. *JHRS*, 2(1). journal.ypidathu.or.id
- Nosratabadi, S., Khazami, N., Ben Abdallah, M., Lackner, Z., Band, S. S., Mosavi, A., & Mako, C. (2020). Social capital contributions to food security. *arXiv*.
- Parrish, S. (2025). Anthropology of Food: History and trajectories. *MDPI Anthropology*. [MDPI](#)
- Priya, S. (2019). Food as a major cite for culture and identity. *Rupkatha Journal*. [ResearchGate](#)
- Quintero-Angel, M. (2019). The cultural transmission of food habits and identity. *Journal of Social Anthropology*. [ScienceDirect](#)
- Gastronationalism. (2020). *Wikipedia*. [Wikipedia](#)
- Kingston's Ranta. (2018). Food, national identity and nationalism. *Nationalities Papers*. [Wikipedia](#)
- Clifford et al. (2023). Othering and low status framing of immigrant cuisines. *arXiv*.
- Wright, K. E. (2021). The impact that cultural food security has on identity. *PMC*.
- Caprioli, C., Kulkarni, S., Battiston, F., Iacopini, I., Santoro, A., & Latora, V. (2024). The networks of ingredient combination in cuisines. *arXiv*.
- Gligorić, K., White, R. W., Kıcıman, E., Horvitz, E., Chiolero, A., & West, R. (2021). Formation of social ties influences food choice. *arXiv*.

Thirachaya, & Patipat. (2019). Culinary traditions and social meaning of food. *JHRS*, 2(1). journal.ypidathu.or.id

Belasco, W. (2019). *Food: The key concepts*. Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (2019). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Counihan, C. (2018). *A tortilla is like life: Food and culture in the San Luis Valley of Colorado*. University Press of Colorado.

Fischler, C. (2019). Food, self and identity. *Social Science Information*, 58(1), 49–64.

Heldke, L. (2020). *Exotic appetites: Ruminations of a food adventurer*. Routledge.

Jansen, S. (2021). Food festivals and gastrotourism as sites of identity performance. *Tourism Geographies*, 23(4), 678–695.

Johnston, J., & Baumann, S. (2020). *Foodies: Democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape*. Routledge.

Mintz, S., & Du Bois, C. M. (2019). The anthropology of food and eating. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 48(1), 99–114.

Murcott, A. (2020). The social significance of food: From eating together to symbolic identity. *Food, Culture & Society*, 23(5), 617–629.

Wilk, R. (2020). Globalization and local food identities: A paradox of taste. *Ethnos*, 85(4), 715–732.