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Perceptions of Surabaya-Affiliated Individuals toward Lontong Kupang Kenjeran as a Specialty Food

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ABSTRACT

Lontong Kupang, a traditional dish from East Java's northern coast, has been recognized as an intangible cultural heritage. For decades, vendors selling Lontong Kupang have been widespread in Surabaya's Kenjeran Beach area, making it a popular spot for residents seeking this dish. However, it remains unclear whether Surabaya residents perceive Lontong Kupang as a specialty food of Kenjeran Beach. This study aims to evaluate the potential of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran to be recognized as a specialty food based on local perceptions. The research employs a quantitative approach utilizing indirect communication techniques, with Surabaya residents as respondents. Data from 284 respondents indicates that perceptions range from neutral to agreement that Lontong Kupang Kenjeran has superior quality compared to similar dishes elsewhere (perceived quality). Similar trends were found in perceptions of subjective authenticity, objective authenticity, and respondents' self-identification with Lontong Kupang Kenjeran (product identification). Most respondents held neutral to positive views, reflecting a sense of pride in Lontong Kupang Kenjeran. Therefore, it has the potential to become a specialty food through improvements in product quality, service, and emotional connections with the community. Further research is necessary to identify specific actions that can enhance these aspects.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lontong Kupang is a traditional dish originating from the northern coastal areas of East Java Province, Indonesia, particularly Pasuruan Regency, Sidoarjo Regency, Surabaya City, Bangil, and surrounding areas (Safrida & Suwardiah, 2017; Yoshari, 2024). The name of this dish is composed of the names of its two main ingredients, lontong and kupang. While lontong is a type of compressed rice cake originating from Java Island, kupang (Potamocorbula fasciata, previously Corbula faba) is the name of a small, clam-like marine animal. This dish is served in a thin petis (sweet and dark-colored shrimp paste) broth and often served with side dishes such as lentho (fried mashed beans) and sate kerang (clam satay) (Yoshari, 2024). Although the exact origin of Lontong Kupang is unclear, it is believed to have originated from Sidoarjo Regency (Safrida & Suwardiah, 2017). Its unique characteristics make Lontong Kupang a potential culinary heritage that enriches and represents local identity. In fact, Lontong Kupang has been registered as an intangible cultural heritage under registration number 1043 (Yoshari, 2024). This is recognizing its cultural significance and supporting its preservation and promotion as a regional culinary specialty.

In Surabaya City, Lontong Kupang has been sold for decades in the Kenjeran Beach area, a tourist destination located on the eastern coast of the city. The area surrounding Kenjeran Beach is also known as a fishing village (Putri & Widiyarta, 2023). This context has shaped public perceptions among people who identify with Surabaya that Lontong Kupang is one of the city's distinctive culinary offerings sold in the Kenjeran area.

Several studies have been conducted on Lontong Kupang sold in Kenjeran Beach. Most existing research focuses on the economic potential of the Lontong Kupang business (Safrida & Suwardiah, 2017), its economic and ecological relations (Mukaromah & Rahmawati, 2023), and health concerns related to heavy metals (Sueb & Lestari, 2025). However, there has been no research exploring the perceptions of Surabaya-affiliated individuals, known by the local name as Arek Suroboyo or "the children or people of Surabaya", regarding Lontong Kupang in Kenjeran.

This study aims to examine the potential of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran as a Surabaya specialty food, based on the perceptions of Surabaya-affiliated individuals. These perceptions include the Product's Perceived Quality (Calvo-Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016), Objective Authenticity, Subjective Authenticity, and Product Identification (Sidali et al., 2021). The way Surabaya-identifying individuals perceive Lontong Kupang Kenjeran may indicate its potential to become one of the city's specialty foods. Assessing Lontong Kupang Kenjeran through these dimensions provides a structured basis for determining whether it can be regarded as a specialty food rather than a merely local traditional food. Such recognition may strengthen its position as a distinctive local food, encourage attention to product quality and authenticity, and support its promotion in Surabaya's culinary tourism. Without clear differentiation, Lontong Kupang Kenjeran may remain commercially available but have limited recognition and added value as a distinctive local specialty.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Specialty Food

The concept of specialty food has been applied across different contexts, including artisanal, regional, niche, and wild foods (Streletskaya et al., 2023; Malone & Cooper, 2025). Specialty foods are also often described as high-quality food products characterized by exclusivity, distinct identity, added value, specialized processing, and uniqueness in taste or method of presentation (de Witte, 2022). These characteristics distinguish specialty foods

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from standard food products, that may be associated with premium pricing and more limited distribution channels (Sanjuán-López & Resano-Ezcaray, 2020).

Specialty foods carry particular significance related to specific regions and cultural contexts (Mills & Rudd, 2024). This is important because they serve a dual function for two types of consumers: tourists and local residents (de Witte, 2022). For tourists, purchasing local food at a destination serves as a way to experience and preserve their travel memories and acts as tangible proof of their visit. For local residents, on the other hand, specialty foods represent a part of cultural identity and serve as a means of promoting local culinary and cultural heritage (Almansouri et al., 2021).

The availability of specialty foods across regions not only meets market demand but also stimulates the local economy. It can also attract new consumers to the product category. As a result, the specialty food industry is considered important for supporting tourism, driving local economic development, and promoting regional culture and heritage (de Witte, 2022). Meanwhile, local foods—often defined by the specific geographic area where they are produced and consumed—reflect a strong connection between people and their environment. They also embody the richness of natural resources and local wisdom in utilizing regionally available ingredients (Almansouri et al., 2021).

An understanding of concepts such as product identification, product identity, and product authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior and preferences toward particular products. These concepts reveal that food is not merely a commodity, but also a social construct influenced by factors such as place of production, production methods, quality, and time. By understanding how a product reflects consumers' personalities and identities, and how consumers tend to prefer authentic products that align with their values, marketers can design more effective strategies to enhance product appeal and better meet consumer needs and preferences (Sidali et al., 2021).

2.2. Perceived Objective Quality

This perceived objective quality refers to how consumers assess or measure the quality of a product based on their perceptions of various product attributes. From the consumer's perspective, the perceived quality of food encompasses several aspects that contribute to the overall quality of the dish, such as taste, texture, aroma, and the quality of the ingredients used (Sadilek, 2019). These aspects can significantly influence consumer decision-making in terms of product purchase (Rembulan et al., 2022; Rembulan & Kusumowidagdo, 2022).

Consumers' perceptions of objective quality can be shaped by various factors, including personal experience, expectations, and social influence. Moreover, perceived quality is closely tied to the authenticity of Lontong Kupang. In the context of specialty foods, perceived objective quality includes evaluations of the traditionality of recipes and preparation methods (Stylidis et al., 2020). Consumers tend to perceive specialty foods as higher in quality when the preparation follows long-standing traditions passed down through generations. The environmental conditions of the production site—such as the setting in Kenjeran, Surabaya—can also affect how consumers perceive the quality of Lontong Kupang (Užar et al., 2022).

2.3. Subjective Authenticity

Subjective authenticity in food products can be understood as how individuals perceive or evaluate the authenticity of a dish. This perception involves not only physical aspects, such as the origin of ingredients or the preparation process, but also the emotional experience felt by consumers when enjoying the dish, in this case, Lontong Kupang (Premordia & Gál, 2023).

The connection between the concept of authenticity in specialty foods and the

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preparation of Kenjeran Lontong Kupang lies in the shared emphasis on providing an authentic experience of regional cuisine. The preparation process of Lontong Kupang, passed down through generations and involving the use of traditional ingredients, forms part of Surabaya's culinary heritage. Therefore, technical aspects such as the careful selection of quality ingredients and distinctive serving methods contribute to the perception of authenticity, helping fulfill consumer expectations and preferences when enjoying Lontong Kupang from Kenjeran, Surabaya.

2.4. Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging can be defined as a profound feeling that holds significance in the context of culture and community life (de Witte, 2022). The connection between place attachment and specialty foods has a considerable impact, particularly within the cultural diversity of Indonesia. Food often reflects rich cultural heritage and local traditions, serving as a key component of a community's identity. A region's traditional cuisine can evoke a sense of belonging that links individuals to the cultural heritage and traditions of their community (Užar et al., 2022).

3. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using an online self-administrated questionnaire. The development of the questionnaire involved several stages: questionnaire design, face validation, pretest, data collection, and data analysis.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections: respondent demographics, Product's Perceived Quality, Objective Authenticity, Subjective Authenticity, and Product Identification. The demographic section was adapted from (Krisbianto et al., 2023). The section on Product's Perceived Quality was modified from Calvo-Porral & Levy-Mangin (2016). Items related to Objective Authenticity, Subjective Authenticity, and Product Identification were adapted from Sidali et al. (2021). All sections of the questionnaire, except for the demographics, used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Sidali et al., 2021). Response items were included to minimize bias from respondents who may not complete the questionnaire carefully (Krisbianto et al., 2023).

Face validation was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire items and their response options were appropriate, relevant, and easily understandable to the target respondents (Carlton et al., 2022). This stage was conducted through a Focus Group Discussion involving 18 participants from the Food Technology Program, who provided feedback and suggestions for improvement of the questionnaire items before pretest stage.

A pretest stage was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The pretest was carried out online with 48 respondents. After excluding responses that failed the response item check, the final sample consisted of 41 respondents. Validity testing using the Bivariate Pearson method showed that each item had a correlation coefficient (r) higher than the critical value (valid) at a significant level of 1%. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha produced the following results: Product's Perceived Quality (0.830), Objective Authenticity (0.779), Subjective Authenticity (0.830), and Product Identification (0.836). All sections fell within the acceptable reliability range of 0.70 to 0.95 (Krisbianto et al., 2023). The validated questionnaire was then used to collect data from the population in Surabaya.

Data collection was conducted by distributing the questionnaire online (via Google Forms) to residents of Surabaya. The inclusion criteria were Surabaya residents aged 15 years or older who had at least heard of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran, regardless of whether they had previously consumed it. A minimum sample size of 273 respondents was required. This

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number was determined using a Sample Size Calculator for an infinite population, with a 90% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and 50% population proportion.

A total of 360 individuals responded to the questionnaire. However, 76 responses contained incomplete questionnaire items, resulting in 284 complete responses for analysis. This final number exceeded the minimum required sample size of 273 respondents. Respondent demographic characteristics were analyzed using percentages. For Product's Perceived Quality, Objective Authenticity, Subjective Authenticity, and Product Identification, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each indicator. The dimension mean was then calculated as the average of the indicator means within each construct. A sensitivity analysis was also conducted by excluding respondents who had never consumed Lontong Kupang Kenjeran to assess whether their inclusion materially affected the dimension means.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data obtained from the questionnaire is presented in the discussion and the following tables.

4.1. Demographics

The demographic data of respondents is presented in Table 1. Age groupings are based on psychological developmental theory, where adolescence marks the beginning of logical thinking, early adulthood is characterized by independence, middle adulthood involves stable life phases, and later life stages involve adapting to decreased activity (Krisbianto et al., 2023).

The respondents were predominantly female (60.9%), with most aged 22–40 years (54.2%), representing early adulthood characterized by increasing independence. Most respondents were currently pursuing or had completed a Bachelor's degree (63.7%) and reported sufficient or above-average economic conditions (73.9%). Their domiciles were relatively distributed across all areas of Surabaya. Most respondents (83.1%) had also consumed Lontong Kupang Kenjeran at least once. The sensitivity analysis showed that excluding the 48 non-consumers resulted in only small changes in the dimension means (0.04–0.09) and did not alter the overall pattern of the findings.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Characteristic	Item	Percentage
Gender	Male	39.1%
	Female	60.9%
Age (years)	15 – 21	33.8%
	22 – 40	54.2%
	41 – 60	11.6%
	>60	0.4%
Latest or ongoing education	Senior High School	29.6%
	Bachelor's Degree	63.7%
	Master's Degree	6.3%
	Doctorate	0.4%
Domicile in Surabaya	Central	18.3%
	East	21.5%
	West	28.2%
	North	15.8%
	South	16.2%
Consumption Frequency of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran	Never	16.9%
	Only once	14.1%
	Rarely	35.2%

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Characteristic	Item	Percentage
	Once a year	22.2%
	Once a month	11.6%
Economic Condition	Poor	9.2%
	Fair	16.9%
	Sufficient	51.4%
	Above average	22.5%

Source: Processed questionnaire data.

Education and income levels reflect how respondents perceive Lontong Kupang. According to Fard et al. (2021), education level correlates with food choices and quality, with higher education generally linked to greater attention to healthier food choices. In contrast, lower education levels are associated with high-carbohydrate and low-fiber dietary patterns. This may be relevant to Lontong Kupang Kenjeran, as some consumers may perceive traditional street foods as less healthy and therefore evaluate them more cautiously. Food costs may also pose a barrier for people with lower incomes to choose healthier food options (Wang, Hao, & Ma, 2024). These differences can be understood through Satter's Hierarchy of Food Needs, in which food adequacy and accessibility precede preferences related to taste, variety, and health considerations (de Queiroz et al., 2022).

4.2. Product's Perceived Quality

One Product's Perceived Quality refers to the consumer's assessment or belief about the overall quality of a product, which is influenced by their experience, knowledge, and trust in the product (Calvo-Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016). This factor plays a role in influencing consumers' decisions to purchase and consume Lontong Kupang Kenjeran.

The data on Product's Perceived Quality presented in Table 2 indicate that, on average, respondents expressed a neutral to somewhat agreeable stance regarding the superiority of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran compared to similar products sold in other locations. The sensitivity analysis showed a similar result, with the dimension mean increasing slightly from 3.69 to 3.77 after excluding 48 non-consumers. This suggests that the respondents, representing the population of Surabaya, do not yet perceive Lontong Kupang Kenjeran as having sufficient quality advantages to be rightfully considered a specialty food.

Table 2. Product's Perceived Quality

Indicator	Mean	Dimension Mean	Standard Deviation
The *lontong kupang* sold at the *Lontong Kupang* Center in Kenjeran is of premium quality.	3.66	3.69	1.06
Positive impression of the taste and aroma of *lontong kupang* from Kenjeran.	3.74		1.10
Positive impression of the presentation/appearance of *lontong kupang* from Kenjeran.	3.68		0.98
Lontong kupang from Kenjeran is safe and healthy.	3.69		1.05

Source: Processed questionnaire data.

4.3. Objective Authenticity

Objective Authenticity refers to the physical attributes of the product and its production

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methods, including the traditional nature of the recipe, the origin of the ingredients, and the combination of local soil and climate conditions (Sidali et al., 2021). The average score (dimension mean) obtained in this section (Table 3) is 3.82. A sensitivity analysis excluding respondents who had never consumed Lontong Kupang Kenjeran showed a similar result, with the dimension mean increasing slightly from 3.82 to 3.85. This indicates that respondents are not fully convinced that Lontong Kupang Kenjeran is objectively authentic in terms of product uniqueness, recipe, and ingredient origin. Consumer perceptions regarding the origin of the *kupang* used may be related to a lack of information about shellfish fisheries in the Kenjeran area.

Table 3. Objective Authenticity

Indicator	Mean	Dimension Mean	Standard Deviation
The *Lontong Kupang* Center in Kenjeran sells authentic *lontong kupang*.	3.88	3.82	0.97
Lontong kupang sellers in Kenjeran highly value the unique and inherited traditional cooking methods.	3.94		0.91
The *Lontong Kupang* Center in Kenjeran sells the best *lontong kupang* in East Java.	3.66		1.02
All ingredients used in lontong kupang Kenjeran are harvested/produced locally by the Kenjeran community.	3.80		1.01

Source: Processed questionnaire data.

4.4. Subjective Authenticity

Subjective Authenticity relates to the consumer's personal experiences and values, such as support for the local economy and local vendors, as well as the belief that their actions have a positive impact on the local economy (Sidali et al., 2021). The data in Table 4 show that, on average, respondents had a neutral to slightly agreeable perception of the subjective authenticity of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran, with an average score of 3.76. The sensitivity analysis showed a similar result, with the dimension mean increasing slightly from 3.76 to 3.79 after excluding non-consumers. This indicates that respondents do not have a strong or distinct perception of their personal connection with Lontong Kupang Kenjeran and its local commercial context. This may suggest that respondents do not feel particularly emotionally or culturally attached to Lontong Kupang Kenjeran or its local commercial context.

Table 4. Subjective Authenticity

Indicator	Mean	Dimension Mean	Standard Deviation
The *Lontong Kupang* Center in Kenjeran makes me feel familiar with the sellers there.	3.40	3.76	1.22
The Lontong Kupang Center in Kenjeran helps vendors sell lontong kupang at fair prices.	3.77		0.98
Sellers at the *Lontong Kupang* Center in Kenjeran are honest and ethical in running their businesses.	3.80		0.96
The Lontong Kupang Center in Kenjeran supports vendors to be more creative in running their businesses.	3.81		0.94
The Lontong Kupang Center in Kenjeran contributes to supporting the local economy.	4.01		0.90

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Source: Processed questionnaire data.

4.5. Product Identification

Product Identification refers to the process by which individuals identify themselves with a particular product, wherein the product reflects their values, self-image, or group identity (Sidali et al., 2021). Although the average perception of respondents ranges from neutral to agree, the average score for product identification is the lowest among the constructs, at 3.42 (Table 5). The sensitivity analysis showed a similar result, with the dimension mean increasing slightly from 3.42 to 3.50 after excluding non-consumers. This may indicate that respondents are more likely to recognize the authenticity of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran rather than see it as a product that represents their identity as Surabaya residents.

Table 5. Product Identification

Indicator	Mean	Dimension Mean	Standard Deviation
Lontong Kupang Kenjeran aligns with my lifestyle and shopping habits.	3.41	3.42	1.23
Lontong Kupang Kenjeran contributes to improving the quality of life, physically and/or emotionally.	3.23		1.28
Lontong Kupang Kenjeran is a source of pride for *Arek Suroboyo* (Surabaya natives).	3.75		0.87
I feel connected to Lontong Kupang Kenjeran.	3.27		1.21

Source: Processed questionnaire data.

4.6. Discussion

The area around Kenjeran Beach, Surabaya, has been a fishing village for over a hundred years. The name Kenjeran Beach comes from the name of the sub-district where the beach was originally located. However, after an administrative division, Kenjeran Beach and its surroundings are no longer part of the Kenjeran Sub-District but now belong to the Bulak Sub-District. Despite this change, the name Kenjeran Beach continues to be used to this day.

One of the most commonly found local dishes at Kenjeran Beach is Lontong Kupang. Therefore, people from Surabaya and even from outside the city are familiar with Kenjeran Beach as the Lontong Kupang Center. However, although Lontong Kupang can be considered a signature dish of the area, it has not yet been officially recognized as a specialty food of Kenjeran Beach. Sensitivity analyses excluding non-consumers produced comparable results and did not alter the overall interpretation. Therefore, the following discussion is based on the full sample.

The first barrier for Lontong Kupang Kenjeran to become a specialty food lies in its product quality. No vendor at Kenjeran has developed a distinctive version of the dish, and issues related to cleanliness and food safety also persist. That said, improvements in the quality of Lontong Kupang sold in Kenjeran have been observed over the decades, particularly in hygiene and safety standards.

The second issue is related to objective authenticity, which ties into the first problem. The lack of a prominent, distinctive feature has led to low consumer perception of the authenticity of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran. This is also linked to the public's limited awareness that *kupang* is actually a local product sourced from the coastal areas around Kenjeran. Although preserving culinary traditions can enhance a dish's regional identity (Almansouri et al., 2021), innovation may sometimes be needed to make a product's regional character stand out. In this case, the distinctiveness of Kenjeran's Lontong Kupang Center is still considered weak.

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The third issue is the lack of positive consumer experiences at the Lontong Kupang Center. Even though the area has undergone significant improvements and become more orderly, it may still be perceived as lacking in aesthetic appeal. Vendors' limited understanding of the tourism industry may also play a role, particularly because consumers can easily compare Kenjeran's condition to that of other tourist destinations.

These three issues contribute to the weak product identification, or sense of ownership, that Surabaya residents feel toward Lontong Kupang. Comments from respondents indicate that most feel neutral to proud of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran. However, a small number disagree, arguing that Lontong Kupang is not originally a Surabaya product, and that the city already has other authentic dishes such as Lontong Balap. Nevertheless, a specialty food does not have to originate from a region, as long as local producers can provide a strong, premium identity for the product. This suggests that Lontong Kupang Kenjeran, especially given its long history and the pride that Surabaya residents have for the dish, still holds the potential to become a specialty food, provided it is further developed and improved.

5. CONCLUSION

Lontong Kupang Kenjeran, in the perception of Surabaya residents, has not yet been categorized as a specialty food. However, its long-standing history and the sense of pride felt by some members of the Surabaya community indicate that the product still holds potential to be developed into a specialty food, specifically representing Kenjeran and, more broadly, Surabaya, as long as the necessary improvements are made. Therefore, a study is needed to identify concrete actions that can positively influence public perception of Lontong Kupang Kenjeran among Surabaya residents.

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