# EXPLORING GEN Z'S AWARENESS OF KUIH KELAMAI IN GOPENG: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract.** This exploratory study investigates the awareness, consumption barriers, and cultural perceptions of Kuih Kelamai, a traditional Rawa Malay delicacy, among Generation Z in Gopeng, Perak. Employing a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Generation Z participants aged between 19 and 23 years (n=15) to explore their familiarity, consumption experiences, and attitudes towards this traditional food. The thematic findings reveal that limited physical market availability and minimal digital exposure significantly reduce awareness and consumption opportunities among younger generations, with encounters largely restricted to festive seasons and cultural occasions. Despite these limitations, participants demonstrated strong appreciation for the cultural authenticity, artisanal craftsmanship, and distinctive bamboo-cooking preparation associated with Kuih Kelamai. However, accessibility challenges, insufficient promotional activities, and the absence of effective digital marketing strategies continue to discourage regular consumption. Furthermore, participants exhibited nuanced price sensitivity, expressing willingness to pay premium prices for authentic traditional products when supported by convenient purchasing options and improved accessibility through modern retail outlets and digital platforms. The study highlights the importance of integrating traditional culinary preservation with contemporary marketing approaches to strengthen youth engagement, enhance product visibility, encourage sustainable consumption, and ensure the continuity of Rawa Malay culinary heritage among future generations.
**Keywords**: *Kuih Kelamai, traditional food, culinary heritage, Generation Z, food awareness, cultural continuity*

## Introduction

Traditional food culture represents a fundamental pillar of national identity, serving as an intangible cultural heritage that links contemporary society with ancestral roots. In Malaysia, traditional delicacies such as Kuih Kelamai, a rich dessert deeply rooted in the heritage of the Rawa community in Gopeng, Perak, embody specialized culinary practices passed down through generations. However, rapid socio-economic modernization, shifting lifestyle patterns, and expanding global food choices have gradually distanced younger generations, particularly Generation Z (born 1995–2012), from local food heritages (Arifin et al., 2026; Albayrak and Gunes; 2010). The potential erosion of traditional culinary knowledge presents a significant threat to cultural

continuity. Generation Z in Malaysia exhibits declining daily awareness and familiarity with Kuih Kelamai. A critical factor contributing to this gap is the scarcity of documented academic literature and heritage archives, leaving informal digital sources as the main channels of public information (Ismail, 2020). Additionally, logistical and commercial constraints exacerbate this detachment: Kuih Kelamai remains characterized by localized, seasonal production and limited distribution in modern urban channels where youth predominantly shop (Arsil et al., 2018). Simultaneously, labor-intensive preparation and rising raw material costs create pricing pressures that challenge market viability among budget-conscious young adults (Gutierrez and Sabbagh, 2026; Larson and Schultz, 2026; Makowska, 2024; Kamaruzaman et al., 2022).

While literature highlights challenges facing traditional foods broadly, empirical investigation into how cognitive awareness, physical market exposure, and pricing dynamics collectively influence youth engagement with niche traditional foods remains limited. To address this gap, this study systematically explores how product availability, digital market exposure, and ingredient perception shape Generation Z's awareness and acceptance of Kuih Kelamai in Gopeng, Perak. To guide this investigation, three central research questions(RQ) were formulated: (RQ1): How does physical market availability and accessibility shape Generation Z's perceptions, exposure, and consumption of Kuih Kelamai? (RQ2): How does social media presence and digital market exposure influence Generation Z's awareness and interest in Kuih Kelamai? (RQ3): How do Generation Z consumers perceive the role of traditional raw ingredients, authentic preparation methods, and pricing in determining the value and cultural continuity of Kuih Kelamai? Correspondingly, the objectives of this research (RO) are: (RO1): To explore how product availability and physical distribution channels shape Generation Z's perceptions and accessibility challenges regarding Kuih Kelamai. (RO2): To examine the impact of digital media exposure and modern marketing strategies on Generation Z's awareness of Kuih Kelamai. (RO3): To evaluate Generation Z's perceptions of raw ingredients, traditional preparation techniques, and pricing dynamics in relation to cultural continuity. This study contributes to knowledge by bridging traditional culinary heritage preservation with youth consumer behavior theory. Practical insights generated offer actionable guidance for artisanal food producers, marketers, and heritage organizations seeking to modernize distribution and communication strategies for traditional foods.

## *Literature review*

### *Traditional culinary heritage and cultural continuity*

Traditional cuisine is a vital vehicle for transmitting cultural values and community identity across generations (Lopes, 2026; Ghosh et al., 2023). In Malaysia, culinary heritage is defined by diverse ethnic and sub-ethnic traditions. Kuih Kelamai, specific to the Rawa ethnic identity in Perak, exemplifies traditional gastronomy dependent on specialized heritage knowledge (Ismail, 2020). Cultural continuity in foodways relies heavily on intergenerational transmission; however, contemporary societal shifts endanger these oral and experiential learning processes (Nyah, 2026; Pradhan and Vashisht, 2025; Nor et al., 2012).

### *Generation Z consumer behavior and food preferences*

Generation Z (individuals born between 1995 and 2012) represents a digitally native demographic characterized by strong reliance on modern technology, visual media, and convenience (Barhate and Dirani, 2022; Dimock, 2019). In food consumption, Gen Z leans toward modern, novel, and globally viral culinary trends (Aybek et al., 2026; Lin, 2024). Although open to cultural diversity, young consumers frequently overlook traditional delicacies if products lack visual appeal, convenience, or contemporary market exposure (Mohd Fisol et al., 2026).

### *Physical market availability and distribution channels*

Market availability plays a pivotal role in maintaining consumer brand recall and purchase routines (Kurniadi, 2025). Niche traditional foods often suffer from restricted distribution networks, remaining confined to rural village markets, festive seasonal stalls, or specialized heritage events (Arsil et al., 2018). Consequently, urban and youth demographics experience low physical exposure (Arifin et al., 2026; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). Limited retail presence creates physical friction, making traditional delicacies difficult to obtain during non-festive periods.

### *Digital marketing, exposure, and media presence*

Contemporary food discovery among youth is driven by social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Andari and Simbolon, 2024). Visual storytelling, short-form video marketing, and influencer endorsements shape modern taste preferences and consumer willingness to try new foods. Niche traditional foods that lack active digital marketing or social media visibility risk becoming obsolete among younger demographics (Alvi et al., 2025; Makowska, 2024). Modern packaging, promotional campaigns, and brand storytelling are essential for connecting traditional foods with digital-native audiences.

### *Ingredient authenticity, labor dynamics, and price sensitivity*

The authenticity of traditional desserts often stems from natural ingredients (e.g., glutinous rice, brown sugar/palm sugar, coconut milk) and labor-intensive processing methods, such as prolonged cooking in bamboo over open fire. While artisanal preparation methods impart unique sensory attributes and cultural value, they impose high production costs and supply chain constraints (Gutierrez and Sabbagh, 2026; Kamaruzaman et al., 2022). For price-sensitive young consumers, high unit costs relative to convenient modern snacks can present a purchase barrier unless offset by high perceived cultural value or premium quality positioning (Larson and Schultz, 2026; Prinyawiwatkul, 2020).

## Materials and Methods

### *Research design*

### *Sampling and participant selection*

A non-probability purposive and convenience sampling strategy was employed to recruit 15 Generation Z informants n = 15. The sampling framework targeted individuals who met three inclusion criteria: (1) Aged between 19 and 23 years old (representing Generation Z); (2) Residing in or native to the Gopeng region in Perak,

and; (3) Possessing prior awareness or consumption experience of Kuih Kelamai. Recruitment was executed through local community networks and digital announcements across social media platforms (Etikan et al., 2016). Sample size determination was guided by the principle of thematic data saturation, where no new codes or operational insights emerged after the 13th interview. Two additional interviews were conducted to confirm data redundancy, finalizing the cohort at 15 participants (Guest et al., 2006).

### *Data collection procedures*

Data collection was conducted over a four-week period in Gopeng, Perak. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were arranged at neutral, quiet locations chosen by participants (e.g., local community spaces and quiet cafes) to ensure a comfortable environment. Each session lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Melayu to enable full expression of cultural nuances. A structured, non-leading interview protocol aligned with the study's three primary research objectives (RO) was utilized. *Table 1* details the alignment between the research objectives and the specific interview questions applied. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' explicit written consent and transcribed verbatim into textual format for coding.

***Table 1***. *Interview questions and research objectives.*

| Section | Objectives | Questions |
|---|---|---|
| One | To assess informants' demographic background | 1.What is your gender?<br>2.How old are you?<br>3.What is your ethnicity?<br>4.Have you heard about Kuih Kelamai before this interview? |
| Two | To achieve research objective 1<br><br>RO1: To explore how product availability shapes Generation Z's perceptions, experiences, and awareness of Kuih Kelamai, focusing on their accessibility challenges and preference s | 1.How frequently do you see Kuih Kelamai being sold in your area?<br>2.Where did you find or purchase Kuih Kelamai?<br>3.How easy or hard is it for you to look for Kuih Kelamai when you need it?<br>4.Would you be more willing to purchase Kuih Kelamai if it were more accessible (in cafes, malls, delivery apps) |
| Three | To achieve research objectives 2<br><br>RO2: To examine the relationship between market exposure and awareness of Kuih Kelamai among Generation Z. | 1.What impact does social media or influencer marketing have on your food choices?<br>2.Have you ever seen any postings or advertisements related to Kuih Kelamai on social media?<br>3.Would promotions, discounts, or online trends attract you to try Kuih Kelamai?<br>4.To appeal to Generation Z, do you believe Kuih Kelamai needs modern marketing strategies? (viral trends, redesigning packaging) |
| Four | To achieve research objectives 3<br><br>RO3: To examine Generation Z's views on the role of raw ingredients in shaping their awareness of Kuih Kelamai, emphasizing their cultural, sensory, and quality-related experiences. | 1.Do you know what ingredients are used in making Kuih Kelamai?<br>2.Does the use of fresh and traditional ingredients in Kuih Kelamai make it more appealing to you?<br>3.Do you believe the processes involved in making this kuih kelamai are challenging? Why?<br>4.Would you pay more for Kuih Kelamai with authentic, high-quality ingredients? |

### *Data analysis technique*

Qualitative transcriptions were analyzed manually using Braun and Clarke (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework: (1) Familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts; (2) Generating initial codes line-by-line manually; (3) Searching for themes by grouping related codes into initial sub-themes; (4) Reviewing themes against raw textual data to maintain analytical validity; (5) Defining and naming themes to reflect core constructs; (6) Producing the final report using representative participant quotations. Manual thematic coding was executed using structured

spreadsheets to systematically map raw participant quotations into codes, sub-themes, and overarching themes without relying on automated qualitative software.

### *Trustworthiness and ethical considerations*

To ensure rigorous qualitative trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba's criteria were implemented: (1) Credibility: Maintained via member-checking, where selected participants reviewed their transcript summaries for accuracy; (2) Transferability: Supported by providing dense, contextual descriptions of the Gopeng setting and participant demographics; (3) Dependability: Preserved through a transparent audit trail of raw transcripts, codebooks, and analytical notes. Ethical clearance and participant consent were secured prior to data collection. Informant confidentiality was preserved using alphanumeric codes (e.g., Participant 1 to Participant 15).

## Results and Discussion

### *Demographic profile*

The study analyzed 15 Generation Z informants aged 19 to 23 years. The sample comprised 8 females (53.3%) and 7 males (46.7%), with 14 Malay participants (93.3%) and 1 participant of other ethnicity (6.7%). Although all participants resided in or near Gopeng, only 9 participants (60.0%) demonstrated clear familiarity with Kuih Kelamai, primarily acquired through family gatherings or festive occasions. The remaining 6 participants (40.0%) reported minimal or passive knowledge, undersoring a observable gap in daily cultural familiarity among young demographics (Ismail, 2020).

### *Theme 1: Physical accessibility barriers and seasonal availability (RO1)*

Data analysis revealed that physical unavailability during non-festive periods represents a primary obstacle to Kuih Kelamai consumption among Generation Z. Informants emphasized that Kuih Kelamai is rarely found in daily retail environments. *Table 2* presents illustrative quotations regarding accessibility. The qualitative evidence demonstrates that Kuih Kelamai distribution remains locked in traditional, localized structures. Consistent with prior literature Arsil et al. (2018), traditional foods that lack presence in mainstream urban outlets fail to establish routine consumption habits among younger buyers. Nevertheless, 11 participants (73.3%) expressed clear interest in purchasing Kuih Kelamai if distributed through convenient channels such as local cafes or food delivery applications.

***Table 2***. *Participant perceptions on accessibility and market availability*.

| Interview Focus | Selected Qualitative Quotations | Frequency / Context |
|---|---|---|
| Sales Frequency | *"Not very often. I only see it sold during Hari Raya season. On regular days, it is hardly available anywhere."* Participant 1 | 12 of 15 participants (80.0%) noted seasonal availability. |
| Purchase Location | *"My family gets it from an elderly lady in the village during festive periods. In town shops or supermarkets, you can't find it."* Participant 2 | 10 of 15 participants (66.7%) cited reliance on informal village sources. |
| Search Effort | *"It is very hard to locate. You cannot search for it online, nor can you buy it at convenience stores."* Participant 5 | 11 of 15 participants (73.3%) described high search friction. |
| Willingness to Purchase if Accessible | *"Yes, definitely. If it were available in modern cafes or on food delivery apps, I would buy it regularly."* Participant 3 | 11 of 15 participants (73.3%) expressed positive purchase intent if accessible. |

### *Theme 2: Digital visibility deficit and marketing potential (RO2)*

Media habits among Gen Z informants are heavily driven by visual platforms, notably TikTok and Instagram. However, a significant digital visibility gap exists for Kuih Kelamai. *Table 3* outlines participant insights on digital media exposure. The results indicate that 10 participants (66.7%) had never encountered digital content concerning Kuih Kelamai. Current media coverage is largely limited to occasional heritage features in traditional newspapers during festive periods. In line with findings by Andari and Simbolon (2024) and Kamaruzaman et al. (2022), traditional delicacies require modern digital visual strategies including short-form videos, updated packaging, and social media promotions to capture youth attention.

***Table 3**. Participant Perceptions on social media exposure and promotion.*

| Interview Focus | Selected Qualitative Quotations | Frequency / Context |
|---|---|---|
| Social Media Impact | *"TikTok FYPs heavily influence what I eat. When a food trend goes viral, I want to try it immediately."* Participant 4 | 13 of 15 participants (86.7%) (confirmed social media influence. |
| Prior Exposure to Kuih Kelamai | *"Never seen any TikTok or Instagram posts about it. It feels like a hidden gem known only to older locals."* Participant 1 | 10 of 15 participants (66.7%) (reported zero digital exposure. |
| Promotions & Online Trends | *"A viral video challenge or funny review would definitely spark my curiosity to buy it."* Participant 7 | 12 of 15 participants (80.0%) reacted positively to viral marketing. |
| Modern Marketing Need | *"It needs modern aesthetic packaging and cafe collaborations. Right now, traditional packaging looks plain."* Participant 6 | 11 of 15 participants (73.3%) advocated for modernized packaging/branding. |

### *Theme 3: Ingredient authenticity, cultural continuity, and price dynamics (RO3)*

Section four explored participant attitudes toward raw ingredients, authentic bamboo cooking, cultural preservation, and price expectations. *Table 4* details informant viewpoints. The qualitative findings highlight a dual perspective among Generation Z. On one hand, 10 out of 15 informants (66.7%) demonstrated strong appreciation for traditional ingredients and bamboo preparation, viewing authentic labor as justification for premium pricing. These informants expressed genuine interest in supporting cultural continuity. Conversely, 5 participants (33.3%) exhibited higher price sensitivity, preferring mainstream, familiar modern desserts when budget limits applied. These findings indicate that pricing dynamics are closely tied to perceived value. When Kuih Kelamai is positioned as a cultural heritage experience with transparent ingredient sourcing, young consumers display greater price tolerance (Gutierrez and Sabbagh, 2026; Ghosh et al., 2023).

***Table 4.** Views on ingredient authenticity, labor dynamics, and price sensitivity.*

| Interview Focus | Selected Qualitative Quotations | Participant Sentiment |
|---|---|---|
| Ingredient Knowledge | *"I'm not fully sure... maybe glutinous rice, coconut milk, and palm sugar? We aren't taught how it's made."* Participant 6 | 9 of 15 participants (60.0%) had limited precise ingredient knowledge. |
| Authenticity Value | *"Glutinous rice cooked in bamboo over open fire gives it a unique smoky taste. Authentic methods make it special."* Participant 1 | 10 of 15 participants (66.7%) valued traditional bamboo cooking. |
| Perceived Labor Difficulty | *"Extremely labor-intensive. Sourcing bamboo and slow-cooking for hours is not practical for young people today."* Participant 2 | 15 of 15 participants (100.0%) acknowledged complex preparation. |
| Price Willingness | *"Yes, I am willing to pay more. It is a heritage food, so paying extra supports local artisans preserving culture."* Participant 8 | 10 of 15 participants (66.7%) accepted higher prices for authenticity. |
| Price Barrier | *"No, I wouldn't pay high prices. I'd rather buy desserts I am familiar with, like brownies or boba."* Participant 4 | 5 of 15 participants (33.3%) exhibited strict price sensitivity. |

### *Synthesis and implications for cultural continuity*

Synthesizing the three research dimensions demonstrates that Generation Z's detachment from Kuih Kelamai is driven primarily by structural barriers specifically

limited physical accessibility and absent digital visibility rather than a lack of cultural respect. Cultural continuity can be achieved by establishing dual-track strategies: preserving traditional artisanal production methods for cultural authenticity while modernizing distribution, retail presentation, and digital promotion to engage contemporary youth consumers (Arifin et al., 2026; Nyah, 2026).

## Conclusion

This exploratory study examined Generation Z's awareness, perceptions, and consumption barriers regarding Kuih Kelamai in Gopeng, Perak. The findings show that while youth appreciate the cultural value, authentic ingredients, and traditional bamboo-cooking heritage of Kuih Kelamai, their routine consumption is restricted by low non-festive availability and minimal social media exposure. Ultimately, the primary contribution of this research lies in identifying that youth disengagement stems from distribution and communication gaps rather than a lack of interest. To ensure cultural continuity, local producers and heritage organizations should modernize distribution by collaborating with urban cafes, local retail networks, and delivery platforms, leverage short-form video content on social media (e.g., TikTok and Instagram) to showcase authentic preparation processes, and introduce contemporary packaging that preserves product quality while appealing to modern visual expectations. This study has limitations inherent to its exploratory qualitative nature, including a small sample size (n =15) centered specifically in Gopeng, Perak. Findings cannot be generalized to all Malaysian youth demographics. Future research should utilize quantitative or mixed-method designs across larger geographical regions to measure purchase intention, price elasticity, and sensory acceptance among broader youth consumer segments.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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