

Culinary Branding of “Ayam Merangkat” Heritage to Increase Tourist Attraction in Lombok

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Abstract: Culinary heritage plays a strategic role in gastronomic tourism development by representing cultural identity and strengthening destination differentiation. One of the Sasak community's culinary heritages with such potential is Ayam Merangkat, which has become part of the tourism experience in Bilebante Green Tourism Village, Lombok. However, its recognition remains more closely associated with tourism activities than with its identity as a distinctive Lombok culinary product. This study aims to explore the development of Ayam Merangkat as a branding asset for gastronomic tourism destinations. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that the development of Ayam Merangkat as a destination branding asset occurs through two main processes: the transformation of culinary heritage into a gastronomic identity and the strengthening of culinary identity through branding. This transformation is supported by the cultural values embedded in the *Merariq* tradition and authentic gastronomic experiences, while identity strengthening is achieved through product development, packaging, visual identity, and cultural storytelling. The study demonstrates that culinary heritage can evolve into a destination branding asset when its cultural values are translated into an identity that is recognizable and effectively communicated to tourists. These findings provide practical implications for destination managers and culinary entrepreneurs in strengthening heritage-based gastronomic identities to support sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism, culinary heritage, branding, Ayam Merangkat

Introduction

Gastronomic tourism has evolved into a form of experiential tourism that is increasingly important in destination development. Culinary is no longer understood solely as fulfilling tourists' consumption needs, but also as a medium for understanding a region's culture, history, and identity. Through food, tourists gain experiences that enable them to interact with local values, traditions, and social practices. Therefore, gastronomy is seen as an element that can strengthen a destination's appeal while creating an authentic and memorable travel experience (Fields, 2002; Ellis et al., 2018).

In the context of destination development, culinary heritage plays a strategic role because it embodies cultural values that distinguish one region from another. Traditional

foods not only represent distinctive flavors but also reflect history, life philosophies, local knowledge, and the relationship between communities and their surroundings. Therefore, local cuisine is increasingly viewed as a cultural asset that can support the strengthening of destination identity and create differentiation amidst competition between tourist destinations (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006). Several studies have shown that traditional cuisine with distinctive characteristics can develop into a symbol of destination identity and strengthen a region's image in the eyes of tourists (Rahmawati & Sumbawati, 2026).

Lombok Island boasts a diverse culinary heritage that represents the culture of the Sasak people, one of which is Ayam Merangkat. This dish is closely linked to *the Merariq tradition* and is part of the Sasak social practice, embodying values of togetherness, gratitude, and social solidarity. Ayam Merangkat is understood not only as a traditional food but also as a representation of a culture inherited through the use of local ingredients, traditional processing techniques, distinctive presentation patterns, and accompanying social values (Sukenti et al., 2016).

The potential of Ayam Merangkat as a gastronomic tourism attraction has been demonstrated by research by (Nurhayati, Saufi, and Rinuastuti, 2022). The study found that Ayam Merangkat possesses authentic, iconic, and unique characteristics that support the development of the Bilebante Green Tourism Village as a gastronomic tourism destination. This uniqueness lies not only in the culinary product produced, but also in the overall gastronomic experience involving local ingredients, processing, Begibung presentation, and social interactions that occur during consumption. These findings indicate that Ayam Merangkat possesses cultural and experiential values that can be a source of excellence for gastronomic-based tourism destinations.

In practice, Ayam Merangkat has become part of various tour packages offered at the Bilebante Green Tourism Village. Tourists not only enjoy the food served but also gain the accompanying cultural experience. However, the introduction of Ayam Merangkat still occurs more often in the context of tourism activities packaged within travel packages. This situation indicates that although Ayam Merangkat has become known to tourists as part of the visiting experience, a deeper understanding is still needed regarding how this culinary heritage can be developed into a stronger culinary identity that is easily associated with Lombok as a gastronomic tourism destination.

Various previous studies have discussed the contribution of local culinary arts to the tourism experience, destination image, and regional identity (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Ellis et al., 2018). Several studies have shown that traditional culinary arts function not only as consumer products but can also develop into cultural representations and destination identities that can strengthen the differentiation and attractiveness of a tourist area (Febrian et al., 2019). In fact, traditional foods with strong ties to local culture, history, and values can develop into gastronomic destination *brand identities* , as demonstrated by the case of Pecel Pitik in Banyuwangi, which is positioned as a regional gastronomic identity because it represents elements of the local food, culture, and history (Febrian, Wijaya, and Amalia, 2019). However, studies on how culinary heritage, which has become part of the tourism

experience, can be developed into destination branding assets are still relatively limited, particularly in the context of tourist villages. Most research focuses more on culinary authenticity, tourist experience, or culinary contribution to destination image, while the process of developing a culinary identity based on cultural heritage as part of destination branding has not been explored in depth.

This situation highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how the culinary heritage, already integral to the tourism experience, can be developed into a stronger culinary identity and serve as a destination branding asset. Based on this situation, this study aims to explore the development of Ayam Merangkat as a branding asset for gastronomic tourism destinations in Lombok. Specifically, this study seeks to identify various efforts undertaken by stakeholders to strengthen Ayam Merangkat's identity as Lombok's culinary heritage and understand its potential to support the development of regional gastronomic tourism.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the development of Ayam Merangkat as a branding asset for a gastronomic tourism destination in the Bilebante Green Tourism Village, Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the meaning, experiences, and strategies implemented by stakeholders in developing Ayam Merangkat as a culinary heritage typical of Lombok (Yin, 2018). Bilebante Green Tourism Village was chosen as the research location because it actively integrates Ayam Merangkat into various tourism activities and develops local culinary as part of the destination's identity. The research informants were determined purposively and involved four informants consisting of tourism village managers, culinary entrepreneurs, restaurant managers, and parties involved in tourism promotion.

Research data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the cultural value of Ayam Merangkat, its development process as a tourism product, the challenges faced in introducing this culinary dish to tourists, and the various efforts undertaken to strengthen its identity and recognition as a typical Lombok culinary dish. Observations were conducted to gain a direct understanding of the process of serving Ayam Merangkat, gastronomic tourism activities involving this dish, and the forms of representation of culinary identity displayed in tourism activities. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the research data through the collection of photographs, promotional materials, tourism village development documents, and various archives related to the development of Ayam Merangkat.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis process was carried out simultaneously from data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation, by grouping relevant

information into themes that explain the research objectives. To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study applied source triangulation and technical triangulation through comparisons of data from various informants and data collection methods, as well as *member checking* to ensure the researcher's interpretations matched the experiences and information conveyed by the informants.

Result and Discussion

The analysis process resulted in two interrelated main themes, namely (1) *Transformation of Culinary Heritage into Gastronomic Identity* and (2) *Strengthening Culinary Identity Through Branding*. The first theme describes how the cultural values inherent in Ayam Merangkat are transformed into a gastronomic experience that tourists can enjoy. This theme is formed from the categories of *Culinary Heritage Values* and *Gastronomic Experience*. Meanwhile, the second theme explains the various efforts made to strengthen the identity of Ayam Merangkat as a typical Lombok culinary through product representation and communication of cultural identity. This theme is formed from the categories of *Product Representation* and *Communication of Cultural Identity*.

The relationship between codes, categories, and themes of the research results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Formation of Research Result Themes

Code	Category	Theme
Inheritance culture, tradition Merariq, Social values	Heritage Values Culinary	Transformation Inheritance Culinary Become Identity
Attractions tourism, Begibung, Experience culture	Experience Gastronomy	Gastronomy
Innovation product, packaging, visual identity	Representation Product	Strengthening Identity Culinary Through Branding
Cultural storytelling, Philosophy local, narrative culture	Communication Identity Culture	

Table 1 shows that the development of Ayam Merangkat as a destination branding asset relies not only on the cultural values inherent in the product but also on various identity representation and communication efforts undertaken by stakeholders. Based on these themes, the results of the subsequent research are presented systematically to explain the transformation of Ayam Merangkat from a Sasak culinary heritage to a part of the gastronomic tourism identity, as well as efforts to strengthen the culinary identity through various branding practices undertaken by stakeholders.

4.1 Transforming Culinary Heritage into Gastronomic Identity

The research results show that Ayam Merangkat has undergone a transformation from a traditional culinary dish previously associated with *the Merariq tradition* to a gastronomic tourism experience in the Bilebante Green Tourism Village. This transformation is characterized by the preservation of cultural values, the use of local ingredients, traditional processing techniques, and the typical presentation patterns of the Sasak people, but is now introduced to tourists as part of gastronomic tourism activities. Thus, Ayam Merangkat no longer functions only as a traditional food in the socio-cultural context of the community, but also becomes a medium for introducing local cultural identity to tourists.

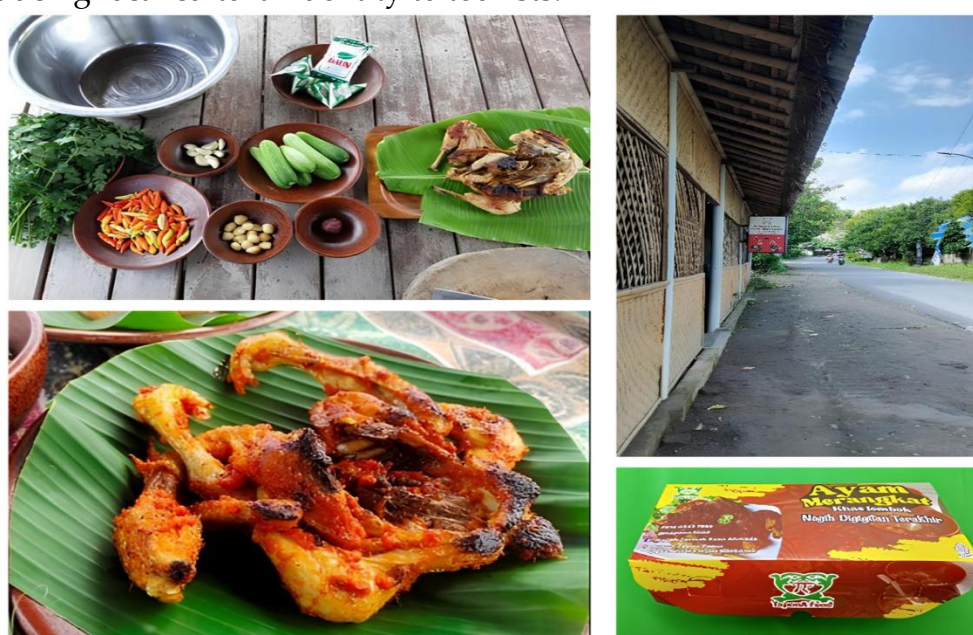


Figure 2. The Transformation of Ayam Merangkat from a Culinary Heritage to a Gastronomic Tourism Product

These findings suggest that Ayam Merangkat's primary strength lies in its ability to represent the cultural identity of the Sasak people through an authentic culinary experience. This reinforces the research of research by Nurhayati et al. (2022) (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Ellis et al., 2018), which positions Ayam Merangkat as a culinary dish with authentic, iconic, and unique characteristics, supporting the positioning of the Bilebante Green Tourism Village as a gastronomic tourism destination. Furthermore, the results of this study demonstrate that this authenticity serves not only as a tourist attraction but also as a foundation for the formation of a gastronomic identity.

These findings align with those of (Sukenti et al., 2016), who explain that Sasak cuisine is an integral part of the social, cultural, and local knowledge systems of the Lombok people. Therefore, the value of Ayam Merangkat lies not only in its taste but also in the cultural significance that accompanies its production, presentation, and

consumption. A similar perspective is expressed by Wargadalem et al. (2023), who suggest that traditional foods can become symbols of cultural identity and representations of a community. More broadly, Amiruddin et al. (2024) emphasize that culinary heritage plays a strategic role in maintaining cultural identity and serving as an asset that can support tourism development.

Besides serving as a cultural representation, the transformation of Ayam Merangkat also demonstrates how local cuisine can play a role in building destination identity. Everett and Aitchison (2008) explain that traditional foods contribute to the formation of regional identity because they represent the distinctive character, history, and culture of the region. Similarly, Rand et al. (2003) emphasize that local cuisine is a crucial element in destination differentiation because it offers experiences that are difficult to replicate in other regions. The findings of this study indicate that Ayam Merangkat has similar potential because it integrates elements of food, tradition, and cultural experience into one unique gastronomic experience.

Furthermore, Jokom et al. (2025) explain that authentic culinary experiences contribute to the overall formation of destination experiences. This is evident in Ayam Merangkat, which is not only consumed as a food product but also understood as part of the cultural experience of the Sasak people. This finding is also in line with Pramezwary et al. (2024) showed Keller (2013) explains that the tradition of culturally based communal eating can strengthen the gastronomic tourism experience by creating deeper social interaction and cultural engagement. Thus, the transformation of Ayam Merangkat demonstrates that culinary heritage can develop into a gastronomic identity when its inherent cultural values are successfully translated into authentic and meaningful tourism experiences.

4.2 Strengthening Culinary Identity Through Branding

The research results show that strengthening the identity of Ayam Merangkat is carried out through product development, packaging, visual identity, and the delivery of cultural narratives related to the *Merariq tradition* and the values of the Sasak people. These various efforts are carried out because the introduction of Ayam Merangkat has so far been more closely linked to the tourism experience gained by tourists than to the product's identity as a typical Lombok culinary dish. Therefore, various forms of representation are needed to help tourists recognize, remember, and associate Ayam Merangkat with its region of origin. An intangible gastronomic experience into a more tangible and recognizable identity. Keller (2013) explains that brand identity is constructed through various symbols, attributes, and representations that enable consumers to distinguish one product from another. In the context of this research, packaging, visual identity, and product presentation serve as representational media that strengthen tourists' associations with Ayam Merangkat as a typical Lombok culinary dish.

The product and packaging developments found in this study also demonstrate that innovation is a crucial part of maintaining the relevance of traditional culinary delights amidst changes in the tourism market. Ossowska et al. (2024) explain that innovation in traditional food products does not necessarily eliminate cultural authenticity but can be a strategy to increase competitiveness and expand market reach. The findings of this study demonstrate that the innovations implemented in Ayam Merangkat do not alter the cultural values inherent in the product but instead serve as a means to increase accessibility and product recognition to tourists.

In addition to product representation, this study found that cultural storytelling is a crucial element in the branding process of Ayam Merangkat. Narratives about the *Merariq tradition*, the values of togetherness of the Sasak people, and the philosophy embodied in Ayam Merangkat serve as a means of creating meaning that strengthens tourists' emotional attachment to the product. This finding aligns with Fog et al. (2005), who explain that storytelling can build a deeper connection between consumers and brands by conveying cultural values and identity. In the context of gastronomic tourism, cultural stories not only enrich tourists' experiences but also help differentiate a product from other culinary offerings.

Furthermore, Madison and Okumus (2024) explain that regional culinary specialties can develop into *signature dishes* that serve as a representation of a destination and build a strong association between the product and its region of origin. The findings of this study indicate that Ayam Merangkat has the potential to play this role because it not only offers a unique taste but also carries a strong cultural identity. Thus, branding serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a mechanism that connects cultural heritage to the formation of a stronger, more recognizable gastronomic identity for tourists.

Overall, the research results indicate that the development of Ayam Merangkat as a branding asset for a gastronomic tourism destination occurs through two complementary processes. First, the transformation of culinary heritage into a gastronomic identity through the utilization of cultural values, local traditions, and authentic gastronomic experiences. Second, the strengthening of this identity through various branding practices manifested in the form of product development, packaging, visual identity, and cultural storytelling. The integration of these two processes allows Ayam Merangkat to be understood not only as a traditional Sasak food but also as a gastronomic identity that represents local culture and has the potential to strengthen the image of Lombok's gastronomic tourism destination.

Conclusion

The research results show that this development occurs through two interrelated processes: the transformation of culinary heritage into a gastronomic identity and the strengthening of this culinary identity through branding. This transformation is carried out by utilizing the cultural values inherent in the *Merariq tradition*, the values of togetherness

of the Sasak people, and the gastronomic experiences offered to tourists. Meanwhile, the strengthening of this culinary identity is carried out through product development, packaging, visual identity, and cultural storytelling that communicate the meaning and uniqueness of Ayam Merangkat to tourists. The integration of these two processes allows Ayam Merangkat to be understood not only as a traditional food but also as a gastronomic identity that represents local culture and has the potential to strengthen Lombok's tourism appeal.

Practically, the findings of this study indicate that developing culinary heritage as a tourist destination asset cannot simply rely on cultural authenticity; it also requires a branding strategy capable of packaging and communicating these cultural values to the tourism market. Therefore, tourism village managers, culinary entrepreneurs, and local governments need to strengthen collaboration in product development, visual identity standardization, storytelling media provision, and the integration of Ayam Merangkat into various destination promotion programs. These efforts not only have the potential to increase recognition of Ayam Merangkat as a Lombok culinary specialty but also support the strengthening of the image of a sustainable heritage-based gastronomic tourism destination.

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