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# Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

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## Halwa maskat: A sweet legacy and cultural transmission among Malaysian younger generation

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### Abstract

Halwa maskat, originating from Muscat, Oman, has undergone adaptations across different diaspora communities, shaping its unique presence in northern Malaysia. Influenced by Middle Eastern maritime traders who once navigated the Strait of Malacca, this delicacy embodies a deep historical connection between Oman and the Malay world, as documented in Malay, Arab, and Persian sources. Despite its rich heritage, halwa maskat faces declining awareness and consumption among younger generations, placing this traditional dessert at risk of fading into obscurity. This study examines the factors affecting the young generation's knowledge and appreciation of halwa maskat, with a focus on Penaga, Penang, Malaysia. Employing a qualitative, exploratory approach, data was collected from 10 informants through face-to-face and online interviews with halwa maskat makers and young individuals, using a snowball sampling. The process of data collection was iterative. Findings reveal that gaps in cultural transmission, the intricate nature of preparation, and limited ingredient accessibility contribute to the decline in young people's awareness and engagement. These insights highlight the need for targeted efforts in cultural education, simplified preparation methods, and improved ingredient availability to preserve and revitalize this tradition.

### Keywords:

Halwa maskat;  
Food heritage;  
Cultural transmission;  
Youth awareness;  
Omani-Malay connections;  
Traditional desserts

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional foods have a significant cultural value. They have evolved over time, reflecting that memories, traditions, and cultural practices have passed down through generations (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). These foods affect regional identity, consumer behavior, cultural heritage preservation, and the global integration of heritage. Malaysia showcases a vibrant cultural panorama with diverse civilizations, faiths, and languages (Fikri et al., 2021). The variety of traditional Malay desserts illustrates the cultural richness and culinary legacy of the Malay people. Traditional food must be preserved to sustain cultural continuity (Bihari, 2023).

Globalization, social change, and digital advancement have led the younger generation in Malaysia to deviate from the traditional Malay cuisine. Exposure to pre-packaged foods and foreign desserts has diminished interest in learning traditional cooking methods, risking the loss

of culinary heritage (Sharif et al., 2016; Ismail et al., 2021). Modern Malay society, particularly among the younger generation, has increasingly embraced commercial food items over traditional dishes (Ismail et al., 2021). The preservation of cultural heritage depends on the present generation, particularly among the youth (Juanis et al., 2022). However, globalization has expanded food choices and endangered traditional culinary practices (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). At the same time, younger generations now favor a wide array of modern and imported desserts, further distancing themselves from local food traditions. A notable example is halwa maskat, a delicacy whose cultural roots and preparation methods are threatened.

Among the many traditional Malay desserts at risk, one delicacy, halwa maskat, stands out for its unique cultural lineage and declining presence. Halwa maskat originates from Muscat, Oman, and has evolved over time, adapting to different culinary traditions. This delicacy, reflecting the impact of Middle Eastern maritime traders, is prevalent in the northern state of Penang. The historical relationship between Oman and the Malay World, strengthened by maritime trade, facilitated cultural exchanges (Osman et al., 2021; Majdin et al., 2022). Halwa maskat is crafted from ghee, sugar, rose water, saffron, and nuts, blending the culinary characteristics of both Oman and Malaysia. This delicacy exemplifies the cultural interchange and historical connection between the two nations (Osman et al., 2021). This recipe has been passed down across generations and continues to be enjoyed in Malaysia today.

The cultural significance of Halwa maskat makes it a subject of study due to the risk of its culinary techniques fading away if not preserved. This research explores the factors influencing the younger generation's knowledge of halwa maskat, aiming to increase awareness and ensure the sustainability of Malay desserts. Societal changes and the growing popularity of foreign desserts have led the younger generation in Malaysia to distance themselves from traditional cuisine, resulting in a declining understanding of heritage dishes (Hashim et al., 2024). This decline in heritage food awareness is linked to the younger generation's disinterest in traditional cuisine and parents' lack of home-cooked meals by parents (Rahman et al., 2022). If these trends persist, traditional cooking techniques may be lost (Fikri et al., 2021). This study focuses on inspiring and empowering the younger generation in Penaga, Penang to learn and preserve their culinary history.

Halwa maskat is rare in northern Malaysia because of the limited availability and high cost of its ingredients and equipment (Fikri et al., 2021). The labor-intensive preparation process is at risk of being lost. Additionally, globalization and modernization have exposed younger generations to a broader range of food choices, diminishing interest in traditional cuisine and leading to a decline in culinary skills. This trend will likely continue to increase the loss of authenticity of Malay traditional food (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). Previous research indicates that traditional Malay kuih (refers to a broad category of bite-sized snacks, cakes, and pastries popular in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, encompassing sweet or savory treats) remains an essential part of culinary heritage, requiring further academic documentation due to limited research (Aziz & Pawi, 2016; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). This study aims to bridge the gap in the younger generation's knowledge of traditional heritage food, ensuring the survival and appreciation of halwa maskat for future generations. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the knowledge gaps in the younger generation on halwa maskat. The aim is to identify the areas related to this traditional delicacy that need to be preserved. The findings of this study help understand the knowledge and cultural transmission related to heritage food.

## **2. Literature review**

Research has highlighted the influence of Oman's history on Malaysia through two distinct cultural elements: Baju Maskat, a traditional attire in northern Malaysia and halwa maskat, a popular confectionery in the region (Osman et al., 2021). Both items reflect Oman's cultural

legacy, especially in Kedah, where historical documents mention them. Baju refers to an upper garment in Malay and Maskat indicates its origin in Muscat, the capital of Oman. The fabric became a symbol of Malayan aristocracy as early as the 16th century, and its design was explicitly linked to Muscat in the 2017 Malaysian Information Department guide. Following Malaysia's independence in 1957, Baju Maskat was adopted as the official attire of the Malaysian king, as introduced by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haji (1903-1990), Malaysia's first Prime Minister.

Omani culture also influenced global cuisine, particularly halwa maskat, a sweet dessert with roots in Oman. In Malaysia, halwa maskat symbolizes its connection to the Muscati population and the Arabian Gulf. Although the recipe varies by region and household, it typically includes flour, eggs, ghee, water, and almonds, with distinctive rose water and saffron. This dessert has been a staple in royal Malay cuisine, reflecting the enduring influence of the Omani culinary traditions (Osman et al., 2021). Halwa maskat is more than just a confectionery; it symbolizes cultural identity and heritage. Its seasonal consumption, unique ingredients, and intricate preparation process highlight the culinary mastery rooted in the Omani traditions. In Malaysia, the dessert is especially associated with royal weddings and significant events, reinforcing its role in preserving heritage cuisine and promoting social cohesion. As a symbol of cultural wealth and historical continuity, halwa maskat reflects the enduring cultural exchange between Oman and Malaysia, showcasing the strong ties between the two nations (Osman et al., 2021).

## **2.1 Internal migration and globalization**

According to Boussaa (2021), globalization refers to an unrestricted international connection. The processes of migration and globalization are closely linked and have significantly influenced the contemporary world. Heritage foods may lose their shape and identity and the meaning they undergo alterations (Aziz & Pawi, 2016). Additionally, the traditional Malay kuih is in danger of extinction due to the neglect of 'petua' (traditional Malay cooking tips and tricks), the absence of practices, and the tedious preparation process (Karim, 2018; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). This is due to the increasing interest and creativity in gastronomy, which has resulted in the development of vast, easily accessible, and readily available over-the-shelf modern ingredients and convenient products, in contrast to the scarcity of traditional ingredients (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020).

This study examines the influence of migration and globalization on several facets of society, such as culture, economy, and politics. The internal migration of individuals within a country, such as the movement from other states to the northern state of Malaysia, has facilitated the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and customs, giving rise to novel cultural manifestations and modifying conventional cultural traditions (Enh et al., 2024). For instance, this internal migration has significantly influenced the younger generation's knowledge and appreciation of halwa maskat, a traditional delicacy.

## **2.2 Traditional method and utensils of making halwa maskat**

Halwa maskat, an authentic Omani dessert, is renowned for its distinctive flavor and laborious preparation method. The conventional techniques and tools employed in the preparation of halwa maskat provide insight into the cultural importance and culinary expertise associated with this Omani delicacy. The primary components consist of starch, egg, water, ghee, and nuts, accompanied by rose water and saffron for the Omani delicacy. Preparing halwa maskat requires a considerable amount of time and meticulous application of specific processes and techniques in order to obtain a dessert of superior quality. Halwa maskat possesses a mildly saccharine and rich flavor due to the inclusion of sugar and ghee in its composition. Prior to usage, it is necessary to knead the wheat flour and perform a process known as 'washing' to eliminate the presence of flour gum, scientifically referred to as 'gluten'.

The purpose of washing flour is to extract flour starch while eliminating the flour gum. Subsequently, the previously washed flour water undergoes marination, necessitating a change of water every 6 hours over a span of three days, until the water attains a truly transparent state and the starch deposits become immaculately white (Zikri, 2020). The tools employed in the preparation of halwa maskat exemplify the cultural legacy and culinary expertise of the Omani populace. Conventional implements consist of a sizable copper pot, a wooden ladle, and a wooden platter to cool and solidify the mixture. This careful and thorough preparation process, together with the use of historic tools, emphasizes the significance of safeguarding cultural history and culinary traditions. The distinct flavor and consistency of halwa maskat exemplify the Omani people's culinary expertise and meticulousness, emphasizing the cultural importance of this exquisite treat. Exploring the conventional techniques and tools employed in the preparation of halwa maskat allows the country to develop a more profound admiration for the cultural legacy and culinary customs that have influenced this Omani delicacy.

### **3. Research method**

The sampling design is critical in selecting a sample from a population, involving the careful choice of individuals or items for study (Cash et al., 2022). This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically the ethnographic method, to explore the perspectives of the younger generation on halwa maskat (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). This research aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the factors influencing knowledge of halwa maskat, with data collection continuing until saturation was achieved (Abdul et al., 2016). Sampling involves selecting appropriate individuals to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the data collection (Karunarathna et al., 2024). Qualitative research allows for open-ended and flexible data gathering, making it particularly suitable for exploratory studies. A combination of snowball and purposive sampling was employed to engage halwa maskat makers, entrepreneurs, and younger individuals who were knowledgeable about this cultural heritage (Parker et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020). Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions to explore participants' views on the cultural significance, traditional preparation techniques, and the effects of globalization on halwa maskat. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews lasting 30–60 minutes, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Data saturation was used as the guiding principle to determine the adequacy of the sample size to ensure methodological rigor. The data collection process was iterative, with interviews conducted until no new themes or insights emerged regarding the adoption, preparation, and cultural significance of halwa maskat. Data saturation was achieved when responses became redundant: participants began to provide similar accounts and no additional perspectives were uncovered (Guest et al., 2020; Mwita, 2022).

Additionally, the study prioritized depth over breadth, recognizing that detailed narratives and participant experiences were more valuable in achieving its research objectives than a larger but less focused sample. The iterative approach to data collection ensured that each participant's knowledge contributed meaningfully to the study, reinforcing the richness of the findings, while maintaining analytical clarity (Bouncken et al., 2025).

Participants were divided into two informant groups: the younger generation and halwa maskat makers. The initial part of the interview guide focused on demographic information, followed by questions assessing the participants' general knowledge of halwa maskat. Subsequent sections explored factors influencing the younger generation's understanding and familiarity with preparation techniques. The final set of questions examined the impact of migration and modernization on the transmission of halwa maskat knowledge. Table 1 presents an overview of the interview questions used in the study.

**Table 1: Interview questions and objectives**

Objectives	Questions
To assess informant's demographic background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your gender?</li> <li>2. Can you state your age?</li> <li>3. What is your ethnicity?</li> <li>4. What is your level of education?</li> </ol>
To assess informants' general knowledge about halwa maskat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about halwa maskat?</li> <li>2. Have you tried halwa maskat before this?</li> <li>3. How did you become aware of halwa maskat?</li> <li>4. What do you think is the color, taste, and texture of halwa maskat?</li> <li>5. When is the best time to enjoy halwa maskat?</li> </ol>
To assess an informant's specific knowledge about halwa maskat.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you ever seen the look and color of halwa maskat?</li> <li>2. Do you know how to make halwa maskat?</li> <li>3. Can you give another name for halwa maskat based on your place?</li> <li>4. Do you think halwa maskat is rare? Why?</li> </ol>
To determine an informant's knowledge about the preparation of halwa maskat.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you know the ingredients used to produce halwa maskat?</li> <li>2. Do you think that other traditional sweets are created just like halwa maskat?</li> <li>3. Do you find the steps involved in making halwa maskat challenging? Why?</li> <li>4. Do you know all the ingredients and tools used in making halwa maskat?</li> <li>5. What is the shelf life of this halwa maskat in your opinion?</li> <li>6. What is the reason halwa maskat does not get a good texture during its production process?</li> <li>7. Do you believe the taste of halwa maskat can be changed by using different ingredients?</li> </ol>

## 4. Results

A total of 10 informants were involved in this study, comprised of 5 halwa maskat makers and five volunteers selected from the younger generation, aged below 25 years. Halwa maskat makers were purposely selected based on their experience and skill in making the confection, while the young generation informants were conveniently selected from the local community. All informants voluntarily participated and agreed to participate. All informants voluntarily participated after providing their consent. The age distribution shows that halwa maskat makers were predominantly older, ranging from 47 to 77 years, while the younger generation of informants were between 20 and 25 years old. All informants are of Malay ethnicity because of this study about halwa maskat, a traditional sweet that is deeply rooted in Malay culture and heritage.

### 4.1 General knowledge about halwa maskat

The responses from halwa maskat makers reflect a deep familiarity with the dish, describing its traditional roots, familial connections, and cultural significance, especially during festive occasions, such as Eid. Two informants emphasized the role of their grandmothers in teaching them about halwa maskat, indicating a strong cultural transmission of knowledge. Another informant mentioned a unique ingredient (Batu Nasila), showcasing an understanding of specific variations in traditional recipes. In contrast, the younger generation shows limited awareness, with some informants admitting to never having heard of halwa maskat before. Most were completely unaware of halwa maskat. This indicates a potential knowledge gap and a need for increased exposure to traditional foods.

All halwa maskat makers confirm that they have tried the dish, often having made it themselves, which speaks to their practical experience and connection to the preparation process. Most of them had been making it for a decade, indicating both familiarity and skill. Conversely, the younger generation presents a mixed response; some have tried it, while others express curiosity about it without hands-on experience. This variability indicates a divide between those who actively engage in traditional cooking and those who rely more on modern food sources or social media for their culinary experiences.

#### **4.1.1 Characteristics of halwa maskat**

Responses from the halwa maskat makers demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the dish's characteristics, describing the color as "deep yellow with hints of orange" and notes specific ingredients affecting the taste and texture, showing a nuanced appreciation for its preparation. Other informants also described variations in texture, such as being crumbly or glutinous, reflecting their direct experience with the cooking process. In contrast, the younger generation exhibited a lack of familiarity with some informants expressing curiosity rather than providing detailed descriptions. They have not tasted halwa maskat and cannot comment on its texture. This highlights a gap in experiential knowledge, as many younger informants are eager to learn but lack hands-on experiences.

The exposure of halwa maskat makers is personal and familial. Informants 3 knew the look and color of halwa maskat to be bright orange. The striking bright orange color of halwa maskat is notable and memorable, particularly for those seeing it for the first time. This bright hue likely adds to its appeal, particularly in social and festive contexts. This shows that tight eye interactions are vital for cultural and culinary information transmission. This early and persistent exposure embeds the preparation of halwa maskat in daily life.

#### **4.1.2 Alternative names**

A substantial majority of informants agreed that halwa maskat is primarily recognized by a single name, with numerous respondents claiming that there are no alternative names or variations. This implies a robust cultural and regional identity that is linked to the term "Halwa maskat" or "Halwa Maskat," which may be indicative of its distinctive preparation methods or historical significance within the community. Informant 2 offered an alternative name for halwa maskat as "Halwa Beskat," suggesting that in some areas or communities, slight name modifications exist, although this is not common across all regions.

On the other hand, informant 3 from the younger generation admitted that they were unfamiliar with halwa maskat and had not encountered it before, reflecting a lack of awareness or exposure to this traditional dessert among some younger individuals. This difference in familiarity between the generations indicates that while some makers might recognize a variant like "Halwa Beskat," the younger generation may not have the same exposure to halwa maskat itself or any of its regional names. Overall, older generations may have some knowledge of alternative names or minor variations, while younger individuals may lack familiarity with halwa maskat, showing the potential for knowledge and cultural continuity of this sweet tradition.

#### **4.1.3 Relative rarity**

Halwa maskat is primarily associated with the northern states of Malaysia, with Kedah and Penang being the most prominent examples. Its limited geographical range exacerbates its rarity as it rarely appears in other areas. This limited geographic availability means that encountering halwa maskat outside its home territory is a special finding. Similarly, informant 1 from the younger generation noted that halwa maskat is typically associated with family gatherings and is

especially present during the Eid festival. This reinforces the idea that the dessert is not commonly available year-round as it is tied to specific cultural celebrations and occasions. Because of this, this seasonal and geographical focus makes younger people think of halwa maskat as a rare treat, since they may only have it in these specific situations. Halwa maskat is linked to specific regions and cultural celebrations, resulting in its rarity and limited exposure, particularly among the younger generation, who may only encounter it during special family events or festive occasions.

#### 4.1.4 Transmission of knowledge

Younger generations reported their encounters with halwa maskat through associations with family and tradition. Family plays a role in cultural transmission as informants 1. For many younger individuals, halwa maskat is introduced by older family members, especially grandmothers, which indicates its role as a family oriented and traditional-rich food item, linking them to cultural heritage. Overall, family and social gatherings are crucial for preserving and sharing traditional culinary knowledge. The selected responses are presented in Table 2.

Halwa maskat makers attribute their knowledge of the dish to familial sources that indicate strong oral traditions. Some of halwa maskat makers learned from their mothers, while others mentioned recipes passed down through generations. This emphasizes the importance of the family in preserving culinary knowledge. On the other hand, the younger generation has a mix of sources, with some learning through social media highlighting a shift in how cultural knowledge is disseminated. Many found out about halwa maskat via TikTok, which represents a new way of engaging with traditional foods, in contrast to the older generation's reliance on familial teaching.

**Table 2: Informants' general knowledge about halwa maskat**

Interview questions	Selected responses
Have you ever seen the look and color of halwa maskat?	<p>"Yes, the bright orange color always catches my eyes" - Informant 3 (Halwa maskat maker)</p> <p>"Yes, when my grandmother made it" - Informant 1 (Young Generation)</p>
Do you know how to make halwa maskat?	<p>"To make halwa maskat, prepare the dough by washing it in water until it forms gluten clumps, changing the water every 3 hours over 3 days with a 'Batu Gendang Sila' added. Take the precipitate of the flour, add water to the copper pot with rock sugar, coloring brand 'Loceng', bring to a boil, and add eggs. The function of an egg is to wash the sugar then we take it out. Add flour. Add cooking oil. Stir until the oil is completely absorbed. Stir until a chewy texture is obtained." - Informant 1 (Halwa maskat maker)</p> <p>"I know because I helped my grandmother shop for ingredients, we need to use copper pots." - Informant 5 (Young generation)</p>
Can you give another name for halwa maskat based on your place?	<p>"Halwa Bescat" - Informant 2 (Halwa maskat maker)</p> <p>"The spelling can vary; Maskat, Muscat, or Muscoth, depending on the country." - Informant 3 (Young Generation)</p>
Do you think halwa maskat is rare? Why?	<p>"Because halwa maskat is a specialty found primarily in the northern states like Kedah and Penang, spotting it elsewhere is a rare treat. If you happen to see it in other regions, consider yourself lucky, as it's quite limited outside its home territory." - Informant 1 (Halwa maskat maker)</p> <p>"It's a special treat that's usually found only during family gatherings, especially during the Eid festival." - Informant 1 (Young generation)</p>

The disparity in knowledge between halwa maskat makers and the younger generation underscores the substantial generational disparities in culinary expertise and engagement. The process of making halwa maskat begins with washing the flour, which is a critical step in forming gluten clumps. The flour undergoes repeated changes in water over a period of two to three days, including a stone known as Batu Nasila, which is placed in the sediment and is said to turn out the shiny halwa maskat. Once the sediment was ready, it was combined in a copper pot with water, rock sugar, and boiled. An egg was initially added to help clarify the sugar mixture and was then removed. Cooking oil and yellow color were gradually added and continuously stirred until the mixture reached a chewy consistency.

Informant 5, from the younger generation, reflects awareness of some traditional aspects, such as the importance of copper pots for cooking, yet lacks in-depth knowledge of the steps involved, mainly due to limited hands-on experience in actual cooking. Overall, the informant response suggests that while traditional makers have a deep understanding of each step, including ingredient preparation and equipment use, younger individuals may only be familiar with certain traditional tools or ingredients, presenting a generational gap in the detailed culinary knowledge of halwa maskat.

## **4.2 Knowledge about the preparation of halwa maskat**

The halwa maskat maker provides a comprehensive list of ingredients, including specific components, such as 'Batu Gendang Sila', washed wheat flour, tapioca flour, and different types of sugar, which reflects a deep understanding of the traditional recipe. Most informants were familiar with key ingredients, including wheat flour, ghee or cooking oil, white and rock sugar, and yellow food coloring. Some also mentioned Batu Nasila as a unique ingredient. This answer shows a strong understanding of halwa maskat among traditional makers. However, younger informants displayed variability in their knowledge, with some recognizing only basic ingredients and others unsure about specific components. This gap reflects a generational shift in which knowledge is increasingly fragmented, partly due to modern lifestyles and internal migration, which may reduce opportunities for direct learning from the elderly. The relevant responses are summarized in Table 3.

### **4.2.1 Similarities**

After the analysis, informants noted some similarities between halwa maskat and other traditional sweets, such as Dodol, especially regarding cooking duration and dense texture. However, there is no consensus on direct comparisons, as some studies also mention visual similarities to baked tapioca cake. This mixed response indicates a moderate understanding of traditional sweets among informants, particularly regarding similarities in preparation techniques, but with varying levels of familiarity with other desserts. This may suggest a need for more in-depth cultural education to fully appreciate sweets interconnected with culinary heritage.

### **4.2.2 Perceived difficulties of preparation**

Many informants acknowledged the time-intensive nature of preparing halwa maskat, especially the three-day process of washing flour. Additionally, specialized techniques, such as sifting and controlling heat, and the need for a copper pot are seen as potential barriers, particularly for younger generations. Those with demanding schedules find it challenging to allocate the time required, indicating that modernization and lifestyle changes impact the younger generation's capacity to engage in traditional cooking methods. This suggests a moderate to high awareness of complexity but a low probability of practical engagement among younger participants. The responses illustrate a blend of traditional practices and modern awareness regarding the tools

used in making halwa maskat. While the halwa maskat maker emphasizes the importance of specific tools in the cooking process, the younger generation recognizes the value of these tools, indicating a connection to their culinary heritage, albeit with limited hands-on experience.

**Table 3: Level of knowledge about halwa maskat**

Interview questions	Selected responses
Do you know the ingredients used to produce halwa maskat?	<p>“The ingredients for this recipe include ‘Batu Gendang Sila’, put in sediment flour, tapioca flour, white sugar, rock sugar, cooking oil, and one egg, yellow food coloring brand ‘Loceng’.” – Informant 1 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“Yes, my grandmother told me it's made from flour that's been meticulously washed, then mixed with sugar, oil, and food coloring. I am not entirely sure, but that's the recipe I heard from my grandmother.”- Informant 1 (Young generation)</p>
Do you think that other traditional sweets are created just like halwa maskat?	<p>“Dodol, requires hours of careful cooking, while preparing rose Wajik demands a copper pot to prevent any chemical reactions. The right tools and techniques truly elevate these traditional treats.” – Informant 1 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“Not sure, I think dodol because of the glutinous texture.”- Informant 4 (Young generation)</p>
Do you find the steps involved in making halwa maskat challenging? Why?	<p>“Flour should be sifted using a cheesecloth to remove any lumps. Stir continuously for hours to achieve the desired consistency. 'Batu Nasila is also hard to find' because our recipe includes that ingredient, but we couldn't find it.”- Informant 3 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“The process of washing the flour takes a full three days to create the perfect halwa maskat. With my busy work schedule, I simply don't have the time to spare.” -Informant 1 (Young generation)</p>
Do you know all the ingredients and tools used in making halwa maskat?	<p>“Using a copper pot and cooking on a wood fire.” – Informant 4 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“The yellow one but I am not sure of the name, it's very costly. My grandmother now takes extra care, wrapping each one in newspaper and storing them in a safe place, ensuring they stay in perfect condition for our next big celebration.” – Informant 5 (Young generation)</p>

#### **4.2.3 Tools and utensils expertise**

Knowledge about specific tools, such as copper pots and traditional cleaning methods (such as salt and vinegar for copper care), is stronger among older informants, who emphasize the role of these tools in preserving color and authenticity. In contrast, younger informants are less familiar with these traditional tools and often opt for modern substitutes, such as aluminum pots, underscoring a generational knowledge gap.

#### **4.3 Internal migration and modernization**

Internal migration and modernization play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge about halwa maskat among the younger generation. Explanations from halwa maskat makers present valuable insights into this study and support the research objective related to knowledge about halwa maskat among the younger generation. The research objective is to examine whether these factors are functioning or not in transmitting knowledge among younger generations. The relevant responses are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: Transmitting knowledge about halwa maskat**

Interview questions	Selected responses
What is the shelf life of this halwa maskat in your opinion?	<p>“It can last 2 weeks when stored in the refrigerator and up to 2 months when vacuum-packed. This method attracts the younger generation, making them more likely to buy it as goodies, especially if the event has a Traditional Classic theme. Hence, the shelf life is longer when I vacuum pack and add an oxygen absorber.”-Informant 2 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“1 or 2 weeks.”- Informant 5 (Young generation)</p>
What is the reason halwa maskat does not get a good texture during its production process?	<p>“The cooking time is crucial, too long or too short, and the texture changes entirely. If we cut cooking time short, the result is a shorter shelf life and a higher chance of getting moldy. It takes 4 to 5 hours to get the best glutinous texture of halwa maskat.”- Informant 1 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“Choosing the right wheat flour, like the renowned ‘Cap Sauh Wheat Flour’. This famous flour makes a difference in the final product, playing an essential role in my grandmother's recipe.” - Informant 1(Young generation)</p>
Do you believe the taste of halwa maskat can be changed by using different ingredients?	<p>“Yes, using the different types of fat which are cooking oil, ghee or coconut oil can significantly alter the texture of halwa maskat, impacting its overall taste.”- Informant 1 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“Yes, using different types of flour can affect the texture of halwa maskat, which in turn influences its perceived taste. The texture might become too firm or too soft, potentially shortening its shelf life and making it more prone to mold. I need to use the brand of wheat flour from ‘Cap Sauh.’” - Informant 4 (Halwa maskat makers)</p>
When is the best time to enjoy halwa maskat?	<p>“The best is during the Eid season, but I also accept orders for travel, bridal gifts, and door gifts. I sell this on online platforms such as Shopee, Facebook, and TikTok because I receive requests even when it's not the Eid season. So, it can be enjoyed anytime.”- Informant 2 (Halwa maskat makers)</p> <p>“Eid Fitri seems like the perfect time, as the time-consuming process of making halwa maskat fits beautifully into the festive gathering.”-Informant 3 (Young generation)</p>

#### **4.3.1 Adaptation of cooking and consistency**

Based on informant insight, the proper cooking process, including achieving the right consistency through long cooking times, helps extend the shelf life of halwa maskat, making it more accessible for extended periods. However, internal migration and the decline of extended family living situations mean that younger generations lack hands-on experience in making halwa maskat. Some young informants did not have the guidance of older family members, resulting in less familiarity with the techniques needed to achieve a desirable texture. Therefore, without the practical knowledge shared in close family units, younger generations may struggle to replicate traditional methods, which impacts the quality of the final product.

#### **4.3.2 Shelf Life and preservation**

Young generations are discovering halwa maskat through online sources and social media, rather than through direct family teachings. Traditional makers, however, understand shelf life through practical experience. Two informants adopted vacuum packing with oxygen absorbers, extending the shelf life of the halwa to two months. This method has gained popularity, particularly among young consumers. With increased mobility due to internal migration, younger people prefer storage methods that allow them to transport halwa maskat over longer distances and store them

for extended periods. These packaging advancements, made possible by modernization, enable the younger generation to enjoy traditional treat while navigating urban and more transient lifestyles. Some younger informants expressed curiosity and eagerness to make halwa maskat based on online information. This demonstrates that while modernization, including digital sources, facilitates awareness, it may not always offer complete knowledge, such as proper storage techniques for traditional sweets.

#### ***4.3.3 Ingredient substitution for taste and texture***

Traditional ingredients, such as ghee, Batu Nasila, and Loceng coloring, are essential to the authentic taste and texture of halwa maskat. However, younger generations and some current makers are experimenting with alternatives, such as cooking oil or accessible coloring, due to ingredient availability or personal preferences. This adaptation indicates the impact of modernization on taste profiles and how younger generations transform traditional recipes to fit modern lifestyles and urban ingredient availability. Variations with reduced sweetness or additional flavors such as nuts or orange juice have been introduced to appeal to younger consumers. These ingredient adaptations reflect the preferences of a more diverse urban audience. Influenced by younger consumers, these variations blend traditional and modern tastes, encouraging the younger generation to appreciate and enjoy halwa maskat in ways that feel more accessible and suited to their preferences.

#### ***4.3.4 Modernization***

Traditional sweets, such as halwa maskat, are typically enjoyed during festive times, such as Eid, as a symbol of heritage and cultural unity. This festival sustains a cultural identity within families. However, younger informants who are exposed to social media and modern platforms (e.g., TikTok) often learn about these traditions from social media rather than through family interactions. This shift indicates the influence of modernization, where festive times continue to hold significance, but are more broadly celebrated through contemporary media engagement.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap in how halwa maskat knowledge is passed down, thus revealing a widening gap between the artisanal mastery of elders and the decreasing technical skills of the younger generations. Historically, this heritage relied on 'vertical transmission', a family-based system in which grandmothers taught descendants through oral traditions and hands-on labor. However, this study suggests that a 'transmission bottleneck' now hinders this flow. The intensive three-day preparation process, particularly the difficult task of separating gluten from flour to take only sediments, creates a barrier that conflicts with the fast-paced lifestyles of the modern young generation. Consequently, the intuitive, sensory-based expertise required for a dish is at risk of being lost as the number of elderly practitioners decreases.

Preparation methods for halwa maskat have changed significantly over time, as modern machinery increasingly replaces traditional manual stirring. Although the introduction of gas stoves and mechanical mixers has improved production speed and commercial consistency, these tools have also distanced confectionery from its traditional roots. In the past, the use of copper pots was more than just a technical choice, because it was essential for achieving the dessert's authentic texture and maintaining the maker's physical connection to the craft. As the younger generations are primarily exposed to modern techniques, they may fail to appreciate the fine details that define the original process. This evolution reflects a broader trend where modernization acts as a double-edged sword. While ensuring that the product continues to exist,

it often leads to a loss of skill among practitioners, where deep-seated "muscle memory" is replaced by a simplified, machine-based understanding.

Furthermore, geographical and seasonal barriers continue to limit opportunities for younger generations to internalize the knowledge required to make halwa maskat. Because the dessert remains largely concentrated in Northern Malaysia and is reserved for specific events, such as Eid and weddings, hands-on learning remains uncommon. However, migration and digital globalization have introduced a new way for this knowledge to be transmitted among the younger generations. The rise of digital platforms such as TikTok and Shopee has allowed the dessert to move beyond regional boundaries, effectively reshaping it as a national cultural icon. However, this digital shift creates a contradiction, where it preserves the cultural image of halwa maskat through visual storytelling and often ignores the actual skills needed to make it. Consequently, the younger generation may value the dessert as a cultural symbol, but remain disconnected from the difficult techniques required to produce it.

In summary, the preservation of halwa maskat requires moving beyond simple documentation of active and structured support. The theoretical findings suggest that modern views on culture must recognize that digital media acts as both a disruptor and protector of heritage. In practice, there is a clear need for mentorship programs to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern accessibility. It is possible to ensure that halwa maskat remains a living tradition rather than a forgotten relic of the past by combining authentic craftsmanship with contemporary methods, such as vacuum packaging and digital heritage education.

## **6. Limitation, recommendation and conclusion**

This study has several limitations. Limitations refer to factors that may influence research outcomes, conclusions, and overall applicability (Hassan, 2024). These limitations may arise from various sources, including research design, sampling procedures, measurement tools, and data processing methods.

The first limitation concerns the sample size and potential selection bias. This study employed a small sample of ten participants, consisting of five individuals from the younger generation and five halwa maskat makers. Moreover, the use of snowball and judgmental sampling techniques may have introduced a selection bias, limiting the representativeness of the findings. As a result, the data may only capture a fraction of the diverse experiences and perspectives across different locations and socio-economic groups. Future research should aim to increase both sample size and diversity. It is recommended that researchers include a broader and more varied range of informants from different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, and age groups to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance and awareness of halwa maskat across diverse demographics.

The second limitation pertains to the geographical scope. The study focused primarily on the town of Penaga and a specific group of halwa maskat makers, which may not accurately represent broader practices or perceptions in other regions where halwa maskat is produced or consumed. As such, the applicability of these findings to other cultural or regional contexts may be limited. Future studies are encouraged to expand their geographical coverage to include a wider range of locations and communities in which halwa maskat holds cultural significance. Comparative analyses across different regions could provide a more nuanced understanding of how perceptions and practices vary with location.

The final limitation is related to the timeframe of the study. The data collection period was limited to three months, which may not have been sufficient to capture long-term trends or seasonal variations in knowledge and behavior related to halwa maskat. Short-term studies may overlook

cyclical changes in the production and consumption of this traditional delicacy. It is recommended that future research should adopt a longitudinal approach, extending the study period to six months or more. Such a design would enable researchers to track changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors over time. A longitudinal study could offer valuable insights into the evolving cultural practices surrounding halwa maskat, especially in the face of ongoing modernization and globalization.

In summary, this study contributes to cultural preservation research by offering a comprehensive account of the technical, symbolic, and generational aspects of halwa maskat preparation. It expands the existing theories of cultural transmission by identifying barriers to the transfer of culinary knowledge, particularly in relation to ingredient availability. This research also highlights the potential of alternative learning methods and digital platforms as innovative tools for preserving culinary traditions. This integrated perspective provides a more robust framework for understanding the evolving dynamics of traditional cuisine in the modern world.

To conclude this research, all the information presented underscores the importance of raising awareness among the younger generation about traditional sweets, such as halwa maskat, which are on the brink of being forgotten. The study highlights a noticeable gap in familiarity and experience between the older and younger generations regarding halwa maskat. Addressing this gap is essential for transmitting traditional knowledge and practices to future generations. Halwa maskat is a traditional sweet with deep cultural significance, particularly in the northern states of Malaysia. The research helps preserve a vital part of Malaysia's culinary heritage by documenting and understanding the knowledge and perceptions surrounding this delicacy. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the varying levels of awareness and understanding of halwa maskat among the younger generation. Effective strategies can be developed to enhance awareness and appreciation by identifying the factors that contribute to this disparity.

One suggestion for cultivating a deeper connection between the younger generation and halwa maskat is to organize interactive workshops where students can participate and learn how to prepare halwa maskat themselves. These workshops can be held in university areas and feature experienced cooks, such as those from halwa maskat Kila or halwa maskat Utara, to share their expertise and demonstrate the process. This hands-on experience will enable students to personally understand and describe the preparation of halwa maskat. Next, during any university-area festival, halwa maskat makers should be featured prominently. They can set up pop-up shops in trendy locations, such as student pathways, where they can provide samples, sell them in small portions, and share information about the cultural significance and preparation methods of halwa maskat. This approach will help to raise awareness and encourage students to engage more effectively.

In addition, students can launch an educational campaign by collaborating with schools and colleges to integrate halwa maskat into their curriculum. This could involve teaching students their cultural significance, ingredients, and preparation methods. Organize essay and art contests related to halwa maskat and share stories about its origins, legends, and associated memories. Hosting storytelling sessions at libraries, community centers, or even virtually could further engage young audiences and cultivate greater appreciation for this traditional treat.

In conclusion, the younger generation plays a crucial role in carrying on the legacy of their mothers and grandmothers. Whether they keep and use the traditional copper pots, inherit and share the recipe, or record the entire halwa maskat-making process, their efforts are vital in ensuring that this traditional sweet does not fade into obscurity. By engaging with and preserving these traditional practices, the younger generation can help maintain the cultural heritage and culinary traditions of Malaysia for future generations.

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## Appendix



Figure 1: The first step of making halwa maskat, the flour was extracted until the gluten formed (TV3 MALAYSIA Official, 2023)



Figure 2: Flour precipitate and requires water changes. This step must bring about at least 3 days (TV3 MALAYSIA Official, 2023).



Figure 3: 'Batu Nasila' or 'Batu Gendang Sila' with the scientific name *Gypsum Fibrosum* was crushed and mixed in a halwa mixture (TV3 MALAYSIA Official, 2023).



Figure 4: The process of making halwa maskat.



Figure 5: Researcher trying to make halwa maskat.



Figure 6: halwa maskat makers with an old copper pot and a small 'Batu Benang Sila' that will soak in flour after being washed.



Figure 7: Firewood stove and gas stove used by halwa Maskat makers.



Figure 8: halwa maskat as 'hantaran' and doorgift for any ceremonies.



Figure 9: halwa maskat with oxygen absorber and in vacuum packaging to extend shelf life.

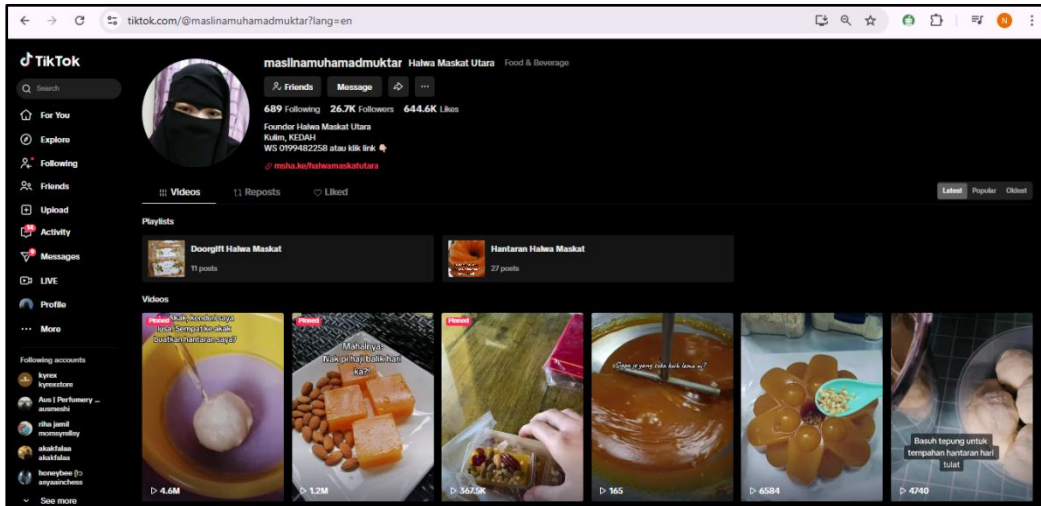


Figure 10: TikTok as a medium to spread knowledge about halwa maskat among the young generation.

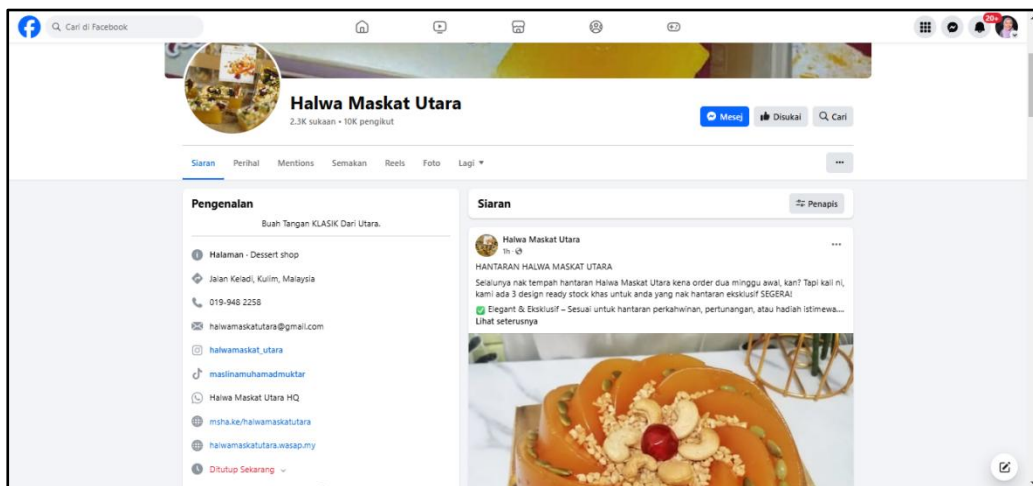


Figure 11: Online platform for selling halwa maskat.