

# Food, sound, and social interaction: investigating the cultural significance of music in culinary practices in javanese society

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**Abstract.** This study explores the cultural significance of music in culinary traditions, examining how sound fosters social interaction, strengthens community ties, and enhances the sensory experience of food. Despite the longstanding relationship between music and food in various cultures, research on its impact on social bonds and cultural identity is limited. The study utilizes semi-structured interviews with chefs, ethnomusicologists, and cultural practitioners, alongside participant observation at cultural festivals, communal meals, and rituals in Java. The findings reveal that music enhances the sensory perception of food and creates an atmosphere that strengthens communal bonds during meals. It also carries symbolic meanings linked to cultural rituals, serving as a way to transmit culinary knowledge and reinforce cultural identity. Specific soundscapes evoke emotional responses that complement the taste and texture of food, resulting in a more immersive dining experience. The study concludes that music is not just an accompaniment to food but an essential part of culinary traditions, promoting social cohesion and preserving cultural heritage. By highlighting the multisensory connection between sound and food, this research broadens our understanding of how music shapes communal dining experiences and cultural identities across societies. It also opens new interdisciplinary avenues between ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sensory science.

## 1 Introduction

In many traditional cultures, music plays a vital role in fostering community involvement, enhancing social interaction, and strengthening bonds among different groups. This complexity of music's social impact drives scholars to explore how musical stimuli influence individual emotions, cognition, and behavior [1,2]. The intersection of music and food has long been a key focus in understanding cultural practices and community identities [3–7]. Music, as a universal form of expression, also plays a significant role in rituals, celebrations, and social interactions, all of which are closely linked to culinary traditions. [8–11]. Research

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by Nazimah Hamid *et al.* indicates that the relationship between music and eating experiences significantly influences emotions, appetite, and physiological reactions [12]. Enhancing the eating experience with soundscapes can emphasize various aspects of multisensory taste perception, a topic currently gaining attention in food science literature [13]. The research by Danni Peng-Li *et al.* confirms that sensory science, nutrition, and psychology indicate that calming natural sounds can enhance reward responses to healthier foods [14].

The results of this study demonstrate how music enhances the mood within specific culinary environments, leading to a greater appreciation of food. Food science increasingly acknowledges music as an important tool for improving taste perception [15]. This indicates that certain soundscapes can promote healthier eating habits, which may, in turn, support traditional culinary practices that focus on fresh and nutritious ingredients. Anthropological evidence shows that music has historically been linked to rituals and social gatherings, underscoring the well-documented connection between culinary traditions and the auditory experiences of the past, as explored by researchers in anthropology and ethnomusicology. By incorporating music in this way, culinary traditions extend beyond mere food consumption, enriching the overall experience and preserving the social and cultural significance that characterizes a society's cultural heritage. For instance, in Java, Islamic teachings are often disseminated with local culinary practices, as seen in dishes like *Ketupat* and *Opor* [16]. In Japan, *Kashi* and *mochi* were used as an identity for the symbols of nobility, who used the elite using food to display their power and social status [17]. In China, dumplings symbolize wealth and prosperity with their round shape and filling. They are commonly consumed during the Chinese New Year and during these celebrations, where music often plays an integral part [18].

Music has historically played a vital role in promoting celebration, relaxation, and communal enjoyment across various cultures. When the sound design complements the flavors and sensations of a meal, dining transforms into a more immersive and memorable multisensory experience [19,20]. This phenomenon, often called "sonic seasoning," involves strategically pairing music with food to enhance taste perception and emotional response [21]. This demonstrates how the use of musical components in the cooking and eating processes can represent cultural values and improve the shared experience [22]. For example, various cultures often sing traditional songs during food preparation. This practice entertains and helps pass down culinary skills and recipes from generation to generation [23]. This exchange illustrates that music is a vital part of the culinary narrative rather than merely a complementary element [24].

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in how globalization and cultural exchange are transforming traditional culinary practices through music. As diverse musical influences permeate the culinary landscape, they alter food preparation and consumption patterns, resulting in the emergence of hybrid cuisines. This dynamic interaction prompts important questions about the authenticity and preservation of culinary heritage. Understanding music's role in evolving culinary contexts is crucial for appreciating how cultural identities are constructed and maintained in our increasingly interconnected world. This research aims to explore the complex relationship between music and culinary traditions, examining how they collectively shape cultural experiences and community identities.

## 2 Method

This research used a qualitative research design to investigate the cultural significance of music in culinary practices. This study uses a qualitative research design to investigate the cultural significance of music in culinary practices. This study focuses on how music in the Javanese context plays a role in cooking or food-related activities. The culinary practices in

this study include preparing, presenting, and consuming food. It examines how music affects shared eating traditions and social relationships in particular. An ethnographic method will be utilized to acquire a more profound comprehension of the participants' life experiences—particularly in the cultural contexts where food and music intersect. The aim is to understand how music affects social interactions and fortifies cultural identities during the time of food. Participants who are active in culinary traditions, such as musicians, chefs, ethnomusicologists, cultural elders, and community leaders from various ethnic backgrounds, will be selected as informants. The study will focus on participants from areas that typically associate eating and music practices. A sample of 20 to 30 participants will be selected to obtain diverse perspectives. Participants will be selected based on their expertise in culinary traditions as well as their participation in culinary and music festivals and ceremonies.

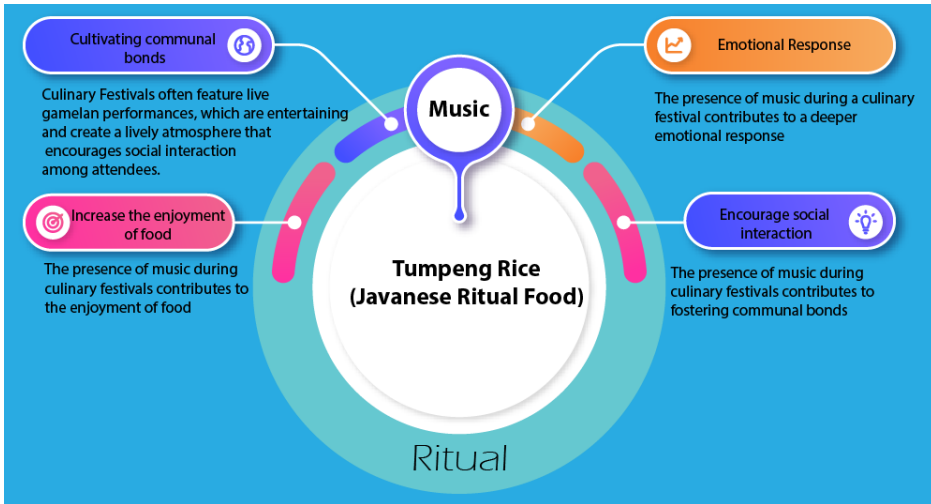
Semi-structured interviews and participant observation are two of the many data collection methods used. Through semi-structured interviews, participants will be able to talk about their personal experiences and cultural perspectives on the importance of music in culinary activities. In addition, participant observation will be conducted at social gatherings with a focus on food and music, such as culinary festivals and ceremonies. In this way, researchers will be able to directly capture the interaction and sensory responses between food and music. Thematic analysis will be performed on the information obtained from observations and interviews. Researchers will be able to spot reoccurring themes and patterns using this method, emphasizing music's cultural relevance in culinary activities. Important topics could include how music affects people emotionally and socially as they eat, how it strengthens social ties within the community, and what symbolic connotations are attached to particular sounds during meals. In order to make sure that the results appropriately reflect the experiences and cultural contexts of the participants, the analysis will be iterative and involve ongoing comparisons between the data and developing themes.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Cultural Context of Music in Culinary Practices**

In Javanese culture, music is essential to various traditional ceremonies and rituals, where food often takes center stage at communal gatherings. For example, during *selamatan*, a traditional feast celebrating significant life events or expressing gratitude [25], Gamelan music plays a key role in preparing and serving dishes. This communal activity fosters a sense of belonging and enriches the dining experience with cultural significance. Music also serves to convey culinary knowledge and heritage in Javanese society. Celerina notes that the integration of music into food preparation rituals can foster deeper relationships. This is reflected in the presentation of tumpeng rice, which symbolizes gratitude and abundance and reinforces Javanese culinary practices' communal values [26]. In Javanese culinary festivals, music is featured prominently, enhancing the overall experience of communal dining [27]. Events such as the Culinary Festival often feature live gamelan performances, which entertain and create a lively atmosphere that encourages social interaction among participants. The presence of music during these festivals contributes to deeper emotional responses, enhances the enjoyment of food, and fosters communal bonds, see Fig. 1. The rhythm of the beats and the harmony of the melodies create a multisensory environment that transforms the act of eating into a celebratory experience, bridging the gap between food and cultural expression. Music in Javanese culinary practices serves as a means to express and reinforce cultural identity. Traditional musical forms are often associated with specific regional cuisines, reflecting the diversity of Javanese culture. These musical elements contribute to a sense of belonging and cultural continuity in Javanese society. Thus, music

enhances the culinary experience and acts as a powerful tool for preserving cultural heritage and fostering intergenerational relationships within Javanese society.



**Fig.1.** Cultural Context of Music in Culinary Practices

### 3.2 Music as a Catalyst for Social Interaction

Music can profoundly shape the mood of a dining experience, making it more engaging and enjoyable. Music played during a meal can help create a relaxed environment, encouraging conversation and social engagement among diners. Johnson's research shows that background music can lower social barriers, making individuals feel more comfortable and open to interaction [28]. This effect is particularly evident in communal dining settings, where the collective experience of listening to music can catalyze dialogue and foster interpersonal relationships [29]. The ambiance created by music enhances the overall dining experience, encouraging guests to interact with each other more freely. The presence of music during a meal can also facilitate non-verbal communication and foster intimacy among diners [30]. For example, research conducted by Spence found that a musical atmosphere enhances a sense of community, contributing to increased eye contact and shared laughter during the meal [31]. The rhythm and melody of music can synchronize the movements and behaviors of diners, thereby strengthening their interactions [32]. This phenomenon, known as entrainment, demonstrates how music can synchronize social rhythms and create a shared experience that strengthens relationships. Music can strengthen interpersonal bonds during a meal by encouraging positive social cues and enhancing overall mood. When individuals participate in listening to music together, they engage in a collective activity that transcends individual differences, thereby strengthening group cohesion. This shared engagement can stimulate conversations about musical preferences, sharing of personal anecdotes related to the song, and cultural reflections, ultimately enriching social interactions during the meal. By shaping the emotional landscape of the dining experience, music can enhance the quality and depth of social interactions, leading to more meaningful relationships among diners.

### 3.3 Sensory Experience and Taste Perception

Research conducted by Campinho et al. highlights that the auditory environment can influence taste perception, showing how different soundscapes can change the way taste is

perceived [33]. High-pitched sounds tend to enhance the perception of sweetness [34], while low-pitched sounds can enhance bitterness [35]. This phenomenon confirms the importance of sound in shaping the overall dining experience and shows that the auditory elements of a dish are as important as the food itself. According to Khorisantono et al., this multisensory integration emphasizes how auditory cues can trigger emotional responses that complement the taste and texture of the food [36]. Thus, when restaurant diners listen to music that matches the theme or essence of the dish, their enjoyment of the food can increase. This phenomenon suggests that music not only functions as a background element but also actively contributes to the multisensory experience of dining, enriching the taste and enhancing the overall enjoyment of the meal. This interaction between music and emotional responses suggests that the dining experience does not depend solely on the physical properties of the food; rather, music is part of a combination of sensory stimuli that create a holistic experience. Therefore, the music played during a meal can dramatically change the way diners perceive and enjoy the flavors presented. Cultural context also plays a significant role in how music interacts with taste perception. Each culture has its own unique musical styles and culinary traditions, which can influence how sounds are perceived in relation to food. Javanese Gamelan music, for example, when played during a meal, can transport diners to cultural rituals and celebrations, thereby enhancing their enjoyment of the food. This suggests that the interaction between music and taste perception is deeply rooted in cultural identity and shared culinary experiences. Understanding the interaction between music and taste perception has significant implications for culinary practice and the dining experience. As such, chefs and restaurateurs can leverage this knowledge to create immersive dining environments that enhance the overall experience.

### **3.4 Symbolism and Ritual in Culinary Traditions**

In Javanese culture, music plays a significant role in culinary rituals, serving as a powerful symbol of identity and cultural heritage. Traditional music often played during communal cooking and eating, reflects the values, beliefs, and historical narratives of Javanese society over time. Using gamelan in a culinary context is an aesthetic choice and a means of connecting participants to their cultural roots. This suggests that rhythm and melody are closely linked to communal identity, contributing to a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. This connection emphasizes that food and music are intertwined expressions of cultural heritage, deepening the meaning of culinary practices. Music in Javanese culinary rituals often has a ritual function that strengthens social cohesion and community ties. The incorporation of music creates a celebratory atmosphere in which participants engage in a shared experience, thereby strengthening communal ties. In this context, the symbolic meaning of music goes beyond mere entertainment; music becomes an essential component of rituals that strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of unity among community members.

The act of preparing and serving food in Javanese culture is often accompanied by music, which gives symbolic meaning to the culinary process. For example, at weddings, Javanese gamelan accompaniment accompanies serving food to guests, symbolizing respect. This harmonious integration of sound and food enriches the sensory experience and reinforces the spiritual and cultural meanings inherent in the culinary tradition. This fact underlines the importance of music as a memory aid, ensuring that culinary practices remain alive and relevant in society. By integrating music into the culinary process, Javanese culture preserves a rich heritage, allowing the younger generation to connect with their ancestors.

### **3.5 Gaps in Existing Literature and Suggestions for Future Research on Music in Javanese Culinary Practices**

Although existing research has addressed the relationship between music and culinary practices in Javanese culture, there is still a significant gap in understanding the regional variations across Java. Future research could focus on comparative studies across Javanese communities to explore how local music influences culinary traditions, ingredients used, and communal eating practices. Such studies could reveal unique cultural adaptations and highlight the diversity in Javanese culinary customs. Existing literature often discusses music in general terms without delving into specific culinary practices or food types. Future research could examine how music influences specific Javanese dishes or cooking techniques, as well as whether particular music genres are associated with particular foods or rituals. For example, studying the role of music during rice planting ceremonies or traditional feasts could provide insight into how sound enhances the cultural meaning of these events and the foods prepared. This research focus could also provide insight into the sensory experiences associated with food preparation and consumption. Investigating the role of music in culinary education, especially among the younger generation, could provide important insights into cultural preservation and innovation. This area of research could also contribute to culinary programs and educational initiatives aimed at preserving Javanese culinary traditions.

Furthermore, existing research has not explored much of the emotional and psychological impact of music on the dining experience in Javanese culture. Future research could examine how specific musical elements—such as tempo, melody, or rhythm—influence emotional states, sensory perceptions, and overall enjoyment of food. Understanding these psychological dimensions could enrich our understanding of the multisensory experience of dining in Javanese culture. Such research could also have practical applications, for example, in restaurant settings and culinary events, by creating environments that support social interaction and enhance appreciation of traditional Javanese cuisine. While there is a fundamental understanding of the interaction between music and culinary practices in Javanese culture, critical gaps that offer significant future research opportunities remain. By investigating regional variations, modern influences, specific culinary practices, the role of music in education, and emotional responses to sound, researchers could deepen our understanding of how music shapes the culinary experience in Javanese society. Addressing these gaps would not only enrich the fields of ethnomusicology and culinary studies but also contribute to the preservation and innovation of Javanese cultural heritage.

## **4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the vital role of music in culinary traditions. It shows that sound enhances the sensory experience of food, promotes social interaction, and strengthens community bonds. The research highlights its importance in reinforcing cultural identity by illustrating how music embodies symbolic meanings linked to cultural rituals and serves as a conduit for transmitting culinary knowledge. The emotional responses evoked by specific soundscapes create a more immersive dining experience, supporting the idea that music is an essential element of communal meals rather than just a backdrop. This exploration deepens our understanding of the multisensory relationship between food and sound, highlighting the importance of music in shaping cultural identities and fostering social cohesion. Additionally, the study paves the way for interdisciplinary research, encouraging further investigation into the intersections of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sensory science, ultimately aiding in preserving and appreciating diverse culinary heritages.

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