



MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

E-ISSN: 3083-9343





Published By:

**Akademi Tenggara Press,
Akademi Tenggara Enterprise**

On 27th February 2025

<https://shorturl.at/FGiV2>

MULTIDISCIPLINARY IN ACTION

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



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PUBLISHED BY

Akademi Tenggara Press,
A department under Akademi Tenggara Enterprise
admin@akademitenggara.com

This journal is published yearly.

AKADEMI TENGGARA ENTERPRISE

In Collaboration with academics and students of
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
from the Department of History & Civilisation, for
the course Public History (HIST 2303)

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Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

E-ISSN: 3083-9343



PREFACE

FROM THE TABLE OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Multidisciplinary in Action Journal, published by Akademi Tenggara Enterprise.

This issue is a result of a collaborative effort with academics and students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Department of History & Civilisation, for the course Public History (HIST 2303).

It brings together twelve insightful articles that reflect various themes, from cultural identity and public history to educational advancements and political movements. Each piece offers a unique perspective, contributing to the understanding of our shared heritage and contemporary society.

The first article, “Batik Thursdays: Exploring Cultural Preservation in Government Workplaces through a Public History Lens”, discusses how the practice of wearing batik among public servants emphasizes cultural pride and national identity. The article highlights how this traditional attire remains relevant within the evolving professional landscape.

The second article, “KLCC Twin Towers Through the Lens of Public History: A National Icon Reflecting Malaysia’s Aspirations and Realities”, examines Malaysia's iconic landmark, reflecting its role as a symbol of national progress and the complexities tied to modernization efforts.

The third piece, “Fall of Barisan Nasional in GE14 and Media Framing: Revisiting the Event through Public History ”, examines one of Malaysia’s key political turning points, exploring the influence of media narratives during this crucial general election.



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FROM THE TABLE OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In the fourth article, “Perceptions on the Establishment of AHAS KIRKHS, IIUM Through the Lens of Public History”, the authors explore the historical and societal impacts of this institution, shedding light on its contributions to Islamic education and intellectual growth. The student union has shaped student representation and contributed to campus dynamics.

The fifth contribution, “Reclaiming the Glory of ISTAC: A Journey Through Public History”, reflects on the historical significance of ISTAC and its role in advancing academic excellence, offering a thoughtful narrative on the institution’s transformation over time.

Following that, the sixth article, “Undi18 Reform: Exploring Youth Participation, Political Literacy, and Media Influence through a Public History Lens”, highlights the impact of the Undi 18 movement, demonstrating the growing political engagement among Malaysia’s younger generation.

In the seventh article, “Public Perception of the Establishment of IIUM Student Union: Relevance, Challenges, and Future Directions”, the authors investigate how the establishment of the student union has shaped student representation and contributed to campus dynamics.

The eighth piece, “Significance and Sustainability of Communiversity at IIUM: A Public History Project”, focuses on how the concept of “*communiversity*” nurtures stronger community ties and highlights the university’s role as a societal partner.

The ninth article, “The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens”, narrates the story of this popular dish, emphasizing its cultural significance and how it serves as a reflection of local identity and entrepreneurship.



Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025

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The tenth article, “Evolution of Learning and Malaysian Education Industry Digitization in the Pandemic Era (2020-2024): A Public History Project and Literature Survey” discusses how digital transformation has reshaped the education sector in recent years, with a focus on IIUM’s experiences.

The eleventh contribution, “Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 on SPM 2020 Candidates: A Comparative Public History Analysis”, explores the pandemic’s impact on education, highlighting the resilience and adaptability shown by students and educators during unprecedented times.

Lastly, the twelfth article, “Visa Challenges at IIUM (2020-2024): Bureaucratic Hurdles and Their Impacts on International Students’ Enrolment”, provides an in-depth account of the administrative challenges faced by international students and their impact on access to education and inclusion.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I extend heartfelt thanks to all contributors and reviewers whose efforts have brought this issue to fruition. We hope these articles will spark meaningful discussions, inspire future research, and serve as a resource for students, academics, and society at large.

Warm regards,
Dr. Lin Sakrawathi
Editor-in-Chief, Multidisciplinary in Action
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Akademi Tenggara Enterprise

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THE PHENOMENA OF AYAM GEPUK:

CULINARY ASSIMILATION AND IDENTITY THROUGH
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The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens

Hayani Nazurah Hasram, Kamilia Atiqah Kamarudin, Mayyizah Husna Jamaludin, Nur Azwa Fizlin Zainal, Nur Hana Humaira Norhisham, Nur Iwana Damia Mohd Asta and Siti Hadija Mohd

To cite:

Hasram, H. N., Kamarudin, K. A., Jamaludin, M. H., Zainal, N. A. F., Norhisham, N. H. H., Mohd Asta, N. I. D., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). The phenomena of *ayam gepuk*: Culinary assimilation and identity through public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1). Akademi Tenggara Press.

Abstract

This study examines the evolution of *ayam gepuk* in Malaysia, tracing its cultural, economic, and historical significance through the lens of public history. Originating from Indonesia, *ayam gepuk* has become a staple in Malaysian cuisine, reflecting deep-rooted culinary exchanges shaped by migration, trade, and social adaptation. By exploring its transition from a traditional dish to a modern commercialized food phenomenon, this research contextualizes *ayam gepuk* within discussions on food heritage, globalization, and economic resilience. Using historical research methods, oral histories, social media analysis, and site visits, this study documents how *ayam gepuk* vendors and consumers navigate market challenges, digital branding, and changing food preferences. Findings highlight that while digital marketing and food delivery platforms have accelerated *ayam gepuk*'s popularity, issues such as rising operational costs and authenticity concerns present obstacles to sustaining its traditional identity. By framing *ayam gepuk* as both a culinary tradition and an entrepreneurial venture, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on cultural preservation, food heritage, and public engagement with history.

Keywords: *Public history, ayam gepuk, food heritage, Malaysian cuisine, digital food marketing, culinary globalization, social media, migration and food*

The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens

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Introduction

Ayam gepuk has emerged as a culinary staple in Malaysia, particularly in Selangor, where its distinctive spicy flavours and cultural influences have made it a beloved dish. More than just a food trend, *ayam gepuk* represents a blend of traditional cooking practices (Aima & Nopiah, 2020) with modern adaptations, reflecting larger historical patterns of culinary exchange, economic survival, and cultural identity (Abidin et al., 2020). The increasing popularity of *ayam gepuk* (Abd Mutalib, 2025) is driven by its affordability, accessibility, and the rise of digital marketing strategies that have amplified its reach. However, the evolution of this dish is not merely a product of recent trends but is deeply rooted in Malaysia's rich gastronomic heritage, shaped by migration, trade, and social adaptation over time (Yoshino, 2010). As a dish with Indonesian origins (Suhaimi, 2023), *ayam gepuk*'s assimilation into Malaysian cuisine is emblematic of the long-standing culinary connections between the two nations (Abidin et al., 2020), shaped by centuries of trade, migration, and cultural exchange. These historical foundations provide a wider context for understanding how food evolves within a society and how communities adopt and adapt foreign influences to create something uniquely their own (Abidin et al., 2020). By tracing the trajectory of *ayam gepuk* from its origins to its current widespread appeal in Malaysia, this study situates the dish within a larger framework of culinary history and transnational cultural adaptation.

This study examines the cultural, economic, and social significance of *ayam gepuk* in Selangor, exploring how traditional culinary practices intersect with contemporary influences. From a public history perspective, the study highlights how the narrative of *ayam gepuk* has been shaped by historical forces, digital media, and economic resilience. By documenting its rise and transformation, the project seeks to understand how local businesses and consumers contribute to the continuity of this culinary tradition while navigating modern challenges (Ismail, Karim, & Othman, 2013). More than just an analysis of the dish itself, this study frames *ayam gepuk* as a historical artifact—a representation of shifting socio-economic trends, evolving culinary practices, and the enduring resilience of local food businesses. Public history, as an approach, emphasizes how the past is preserved, interpreted, and communicated to a larger audience.

This study applies public history methodologies to examine how *ayam gepuk* is remembered, discussed, and marketed in digital spaces, public discourse, and oral histories. Through interviews with sellers and consumers, as well as social media analysis, this research seeks to document the lived experiences, personal narratives, and collective memories associated with *ayam gepuk*. In doing so, it contributes to the larger field of public history by demonstrating how everyday practices, such as eating and food entrepreneurship, which carry historical significance that extends beyond individual consumption. Furthermore, this project aims to bridge the gap between academic research and public engagement by emphasizing the role of storytelling in shaping how *ayam gepuk* is understood today. The ways in which vendors market the dish, how consumers perceive it, and how it is discussed in social media narratives all contribute to a larger historical record that future generations will look upon to understand the dynamics of food culture in 21st-century Malaysia. By positioning *ayam gepuk* within the framework of public history, this study seeks to highlight the power of food as a cultural touchstone—one that encapsulates migration histories, economic struggles, and societal adaptations.

The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens

Hasram, H. N., Kamarudin, K. A., Jamaludin, M. H., Zainal, N. A. F., Norhisham, N. H. H., Mohd Asta, N. I. D., & Mohd, S. H. (2025). The phenomena of *ayam gepuk*: Culinary assimilation and identity through public history lens. *Multidisciplinary in Action*, 1(1). Akademi Tenggara Press.

Ultimately, this research accentuates the idea that food is more than sustenance; it is a vessel for memory, identity, and resilience. By studying *ayam gepuk* through the lens of public history, we gain insight into how traditional foods survive, adapt, and thrive in an ever-changing economic and cultural landscape. This study, therefore, not only contributes to the historiography of Malaysian cuisine but also advocates for the preservation and appreciation of culinary heritage in the face of globalization and modernization.

Problem Statement

The rising popularity of *ayam gepuk* in Malaysia presents an opportunity to explore its cultural, economic, and historical relevance within a larger historical framework. While modern marketing strategies and digital platforms have expanded its reach, the dish's deep-rooted connections to migration, trade, and evolving food traditions remain not very well explored. The dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, as reflected in the continued adaptation of *ayam gepuk*, raises critical questions about the sustainability and authenticity of heritage cuisines in a rapidly globalizing world.

Many *ayam gepuk* sellers in Selangor navigate economic and operational challenges, including market saturation, fluctuating ingredient costs, and shifting consumer preferences driven by social media trends. Despite these challenges, sellers continue to innovate by leveraging online food delivery platforms, experimenting with different sambal variations, and engaging in digital branding to maintain their competitive edge. However, these adaptations bring forth critical discussions about the balance between preserving traditional culinary practices and accommodating modern consumer demands.

By applying a public history approach, this study seeks to document and interpret the narratives of *ayam gepuk* vendors, consumers, and digital influencers, positioning the dish within a historical continuum of food culture evolution. It examines how *ayam gepuk* is remembered, marketed, and reinterpreted across different platforms and communities, reflecting both resilience and transformation. Through oral histories, social media content analysis, and historical contextualization, this research aims to bridge the past and present, providing an in-depth understanding of how *ayam gepuk* continues to shape and be shaped by cultural and economic forces in Malaysia.

The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens

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Objectives

This study aims to document and analyse the historical trajectory of *ayam gepuk*, positioning it within the larger framework of culinary heritage, migration, and adaptation. By applying a public history approach, the research seeks to explore how *ayam gepuk* has been shaped by transnational influences while also becoming a deeply embedded part of Malaysian food culture. Furthermore, this study investigates the economic and social dynamics of *ayam gepuk* businesses in Selangor, assessing their resilience in the face of digitalization, changing consumer behaviours, and market competition. It aims to highlight the ways in which vendors have preserved traditional preparation methods while incorporating modern strategies to sustain their businesses.

Additionally, this research seeks to capture and analyse public narratives surrounding *ayam gepuk* through oral histories, digital storytelling, and social media analysis. By examining how consumers and sellers interact with and discuss the dish, the study contributes to a larger understanding of how food is both a personal and collective historical experience. Finally, this research aspires to bridge academic inquiry with public engagement, ensuring that the knowledge produced is accessible and meaningful to a wider audience, including policymakers, food entrepreneurs, and culinary historians.

Methodology

This study employs a historical research methodology, incorporating literature reviews, site visits, social media analysis, and oral interviews with key stakeholders, including *ayam gepuk* sellers, consumers, and food industry experts. The research involves a thematic analysis of interviews and digital content to identify key patterns in the popularity and commercialization of *ayam gepuk*. Data collection methods include direct interviews with vendors such as the owners of *Ayam gepuk Spicy* and *Ayam gepuk AZ*, as well as consumers with varying levels of enthusiasm for the dish. Additionally, a content analysis of platforms such as TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and ShopeeFood is conducted to understand how digital marketing and online engagement influence *ayam gepuk*'s demand and perception.

The study also includes on-site observations and field notes from visits to popular *ayam gepuk* establishments. These observations provide insights into preparation methods, customer interactions, and business strategies adopted by vendors to sustain their operations. Cross-referencing oral interviews with historical records and digital trends ensures accuracy in documenting *ayam gepuk*'s evolving role in Malaysian society.

Challenges encountered during data collection included interview rejections, language barriers, and environmental noise. To mitigate these issues, the researchers improved communication strategies to convey the significance of the interviews, sought translations for non-Malay sources, and utilized technology to enhance audio quality.

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Findings and Analysis

The research findings highlight that *ayam gepuk* is not just a culinary preference but an evolving cultural phenomenon, deeply interwoven with Malaysia's larger historical and socio-economic landscape (Zein, Putri, & Turki, n.d.). The dish's success can be attributed to its adaptability, with vendors offering a variety of sambal flavours to cater to different taste preferences, ensuring its appeal to a diverse range of consumers (Abd Talib, 2018 and Jelani, 2023). This ability to accommodate different palates while maintaining its signature spicy profile has contributed to *ayam gepuk*'s sustained popularity across different demographics (*Sejarah Ayam Gepuk Pak Gembus*, n.d.).

From a historical perspective, *ayam gepuk* reflects Malaysia's long-standing tradition of integrating foreign influences into its local food culture, similar to how nasi lemak and satay have evolved through centuries of trade and migration (Zein, Putri, & Turki, n.d.). The dish embodies the process of culinary adaptation, wherein an originally Indonesian dish has been localized to suit Malaysian tastes and preferences. This evolution highlights the fluid nature of food cultures and the ways in which they are shaped by historical forces of migration, economic conditions, and cross-cultural interactions (Ismail, Karim, & Othman, 2013).

Economically, *ayam gepuk* businesses in Selangor have leveraged digital platforms to attract a larger customer base. Social media engagement, particularly on TikTok and ShopeeFood, has played a significant role in promoting different variations of the dish, making it a viral sensation among younger demographics. The accessibility of online food delivery services has enabled small-scale vendors to reach wider audiences, enhancing their visibility and economic viability. However, the research also identifies several key challenges faced by vendors, including rising operational costs, reliance on online platforms for visibility, and shifting consumer preferences. Some sellers have adapted by offering delivery services, using influencer marketing, and experimenting with various sambal recipes to differentiate themselves in a competitive market (Chong & Stephenson, 2020).

From a public history perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of documenting these changes, as they reflect larger shifts in Malaysian food culture and economic resilience. The narratives collected from vendors and consumers highlight how *ayam gepuk* serves as both a comfort food and an entrepreneurial opportunity, showcasing the adaptability of local food industries in response to economic uncertainty. Vendors' stories reveal how they navigate financial hardships, source ingredients, and maintain traditional cooking methods while integrating modern business strategies (Suhaimi, 2023). These insights not only shed light on their daily struggles but also on the larger trends influencing Malaysia's food industry.

Additionally, the study explores the role of *ayam gepuk* in social and communal interactions. Many consumers associate the dish with nostalgia, shared meals, and cultural identity, reinforcing its place in Malaysian society beyond just sustenance (Abidin et al., 2020). The continued relevance of *ayam gepuk* suggests that culinary traditions are dynamic, shaped by both historical continuity and contemporary innovation. It serves as an example of how foodways persist through adaptation and reinvention, reflecting the intersection of history, commerce, and cultural identity.

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Ultimately, these findings highlight the significance of *ayam gepuk* not just as a dish but as a reflection of Malaysia's larger historical and economic narratives. By framing its evolution through the lens of public history, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about cultural heritage preservation, the impact of globalization on local food traditions, and the resilience of food entrepreneurs in an ever-changing socio-economic landscape (Abidin et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Ayam gepuk has become a significant cultural and economic symbol in Malaysia, illustrating the interplay between tradition and modernity in the country's culinary landscape. The research emphasizes that its popularity is driven not only by its bold flavours but also by its ability to adapt to digital marketing trends and consumer preferences. While *ayam gepuk* sellers face challenges in sustaining their businesses, their efforts in diversifying flavors, embracing online platforms, and responding to market demands demonstrate the resilience of Malaysia's food entrepreneurs.

By examining *ayam gepuk* through a public history lens, this study contributes to a larger understanding of how food culture is preserved, commercialized, and remembered. The documentation of oral histories, digital narratives, and economic challenges ensures that the significance of *ayam gepuk* is recognized beyond its immediate popularity. The research also highlights suggestions for improvement, such as conducting additional interviews with restaurant workers to gain deeper insights into the industry. Ultimately, the findings highlight the need for continued support for local food industries, as they play a crucial role in sustaining Malaysia's rich and evolving culinary heritage.

The Phenomena of Ayam Gepuk: Culinary Assimilation and Identity Through Public History Lens

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