

Optimizing Menu Performance through Menu Engineering and Culinary Heritage Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the performance of Nusantara menu items at Restaurant A using the Menu Engineering approach and Culinary Heritage Performance Checklist, followed by SWOT analysis to formulate menu development strategies. A mixed-methods approach was employed by combining quantitative analysis of 75 menu items with qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, documentation, and customer reviews. Data were collected over a two-month period at Restaurant A, Bali. The findings indicate that the Plowhorse category dominated the menu classification, while most Nusantara dishes met the culinary heritage criteria, demonstrating strong cultural authenticity but requiring profitability improvement. The integration of Menu Engineering, Culinary Heritage, and SWOT.

combination of local and international menus continues to increase. This condition indicates that industry players have begun adjusting their menu compositions to accommodate increasingly diverse market preferences while maintaining local cuisine as a primary attraction.

This study focuses on Indonesian culinary heritage menus, referring to traditional Indonesian dishes passed down through generations that represent historical values, cultural meanings, and community identity. Culinary heritage menus possess not only cultural significance but also the potential to become a differentiation strategy for hotel restaurants through authentic gastronomic experiences. However, managing heritage menus involves various challenges, including fluctuations in raw material costs, changing consumer preferences, product quality consistency, and the balance between preserving authenticity and implementing innovation (Almansouri et al., 2022; Nur et al., 2023; Shahrin & Hussin, 2023). Therefore, heritage menu management requires an approach that considers not only cultural aspects but also economic factors and business sustainability.

One of the approaches widely applied in restaurant management is menu engineering. This method evaluates the performance of each menu item based on two main indicators: popularity level (menu mix) and profitability (contribution margin). Through this analysis, menu items can be classified into four categories: star, plowhorse, puzzle, and dog (Safitri et al., 2023; Goh & Sari, 2023). The results of this classification serve as a foundation for restaurant management in determining menu development strategies, promotional activities, menu modifications, and evaluation processes through a more objective and data-driven approach.

Nevertheless, existing research on menu engineering in hotel restaurants has generally focused on sales performance and profitability aspects without incorporating the cultural values embedded in culinary heritage. Conversely, studies on culinary heritage have predominantly examined authenticity, cultural preservation, and gastronomy, while their relationship with menu performance analysis from a restaurant management perspective remains limited. This condition reveals a research gap concerning the integration of cultural value and economic value in evaluating hotel restaurant menu performance, particularly in cultural tourism destinations such as Bali.

Addressing this research gap, this study proposes an approach that integrates menu engineering with a culinary heritage approach to evaluate the performance of Indonesian traditional menus in hotel restaurants in Bali. This approach not only assesses the popularity and profitability of each menu item but also identifies the strategic position of heritage-based menus in supporting business sustainability while preserving cultural values. Furthermore, this study examines hotel restaurants with three-, four-, and five-star classifications, providing a comparative perspective on heritage menu management across different operational characteristics of hotels.

Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of culture-based food and beverage management studies and practical contributions for hotel managers in formulating more effective,

competitive, and sustainable menu development strategies. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the performance of Indonesian menus using a menu engineering approach combined with a culinary heritage approach, thereby identifying the level of popularity, profitability, and strategic position of each menu item as a basis for managerial decision-making in hotel restaurants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A restaurant is a business unit within the food and beverage department that provides food and beverages through an organized service system to fulfill consumption needs while creating a dining experience for customers (Walker, 2021). In the hospitality industry, restaurants function not only as supporting facilities but also as significant revenue-generating units beyond room sales. Furthermore, restaurants contribute to guest satisfaction, hotel image, and overall business competitiveness (Davis et al., 2022; Walker, 2021).

A menu is a systematically arranged list of food and beverage offerings that serves as a communication medium between restaurants and customers, as well as a strategic instrument in food and beverage operational management (Ruhizat et al., 2021). In addition to providing information regarding available products, menus also play an important role in shaping customer perceptions, representing restaurant identity, and influencing purchasing decisions and guest satisfaction levels (Mutlu et al., 2022). From a restaurant management perspective, menus serve as a control tool that supports product planning, pricing strategies, and performance evaluation of each menu item based on sales levels and profit contributions.

Menu engineering is a quantitative analytical method used to evaluate the performance of individual menu items based on two main indicators: popularity level (menu mix) and profitability (contribution margin). Initially introduced by Kasavana and Smith, this method aims to identify the contribution of each menu item to restaurant sales and profits, thereby providing a foundation for managerial decision-making in menu management (Chandra & Sarudin, 2025). Its development demonstrates that menu engineering is not merely a tool for evaluating menu performance but also a strategic approach to improving operational efficiency and restaurant profitability through objective and data-driven analysis (Salsabilla et al., 2025). The implementation of menu engineering involves analyzing sales data and production costs associated with each menu item.

Culinary heritage is a component of intangible cultural heritage that encompasses traditional foods, along with the knowledge, recipes, preparation techniques, local ingredients, and culinary practices passed down through generations (Almansouri et al., 2022). Beyond being a consumption product, culinary heritage represents the cultural identity, history, and social values of a community, thereby playing an important role in maintaining cultural sustainability amid globalization (Eliza et al., 2024; Ossowska et al., 2024). The preservation of culinary heritage has become increasingly important as changes in lifestyle and consumption preferences may threaten the continuity of traditional foods and the local knowledge associated with them (Nur et al., 2023).

In the context of tourism and the hospitality industry, culinary heritage holds strategic value as both a destination identity and a gastronomic tourism attraction. The presentation of traditional foods not only introduces local culture to tourists but also creates authentic experiences and strengthens the image of a destination (Putri et al., 2024; Kizilgeçi, 2025).

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a strategic analysis tool used to identify internal and external factors influencing organizational decision-making processes (Salim & Siswanto, 2019). This analysis assists in formulating alternative strategies by combining internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats, resulting in SO, WO, ST, and WT strategies (Rangkuti, 2015). In this study, SWOT analysis is applied as a follow-up approach to formulate menu development strategies based on the results of menu engineering evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach by combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of menu performance through the implementation of Menu Engineering and the Culinary Heritage Approach at Restaurant A. The research design incorporated descriptive analysis, case study methods, and quantitative analysis of menu sales data to achieve the objectives of the study.

Research Design

Restaurant A was selected as the research object because it is a restaurant located within a five-star hotel in the ITDC Nusa Dua area, Bali, adopting a casual beachfront seafood dining concept that highlights Indonesian cuisine as part of its gastronomic identity. The restaurant offers various Indonesian traditional menus with modern presentation styles while emphasizing dining experiences through a storytelling service concept. Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify and evaluate the performance of each menu item based on popularity and profitability levels using the Menu Engineering method. In addition, the Culinary Heritage Approach was applied to identify menu items representing Indonesian culinary heritage, allowing the analysis to consider not only economic aspects but also the cultural values embedded within each menu.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through several stages as follows:

1. Menu Data Collection

Menu data were obtained from Restaurant A, consisting of 75 menu items. From the total menu offerings, 53 Indonesian traditional menus were selected as the research sample. The collected data included menu lists, selling prices, food costs, sales history, and other information required to calculate the Contribution Margin and Menu Mix Percentage.

2. Field Observation

Direct observations were conducted at Restaurant A during the research period to examine restaurant operations, menu presentation, customer

characteristics, and the dining experiences provided to guests. Observations were also conducted to identify the characteristics of menu items categorized as culinary heritage.

3. Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with the Restaurant Director to obtain information regarding menu development, pricing strategies, restaurant operational management, customer characteristics, and managerial considerations in maintaining Indonesian traditional menus as part of the restaurant's identity.

4. Documentation and Customer Reviews

Documentation, including photographs, menu lists, and operational documents, was used as supporting research data. Furthermore, customer reviews obtained from digital platforms were utilized to complement information regarding customer perceptions of food quality, service, pricing, and dining experiences at Restaurant A.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through several stages:

1. Culinary Heritage Analysis

The first stage involved identifying Indonesian traditional menu items categorized as culinary heritage. The identification process was based on dish characteristics, the use of local ingredients, traditional cooking techniques, and cultural values associated with each menu item.

2. Menu Engineering Analysis

The next stage involved applying Menu Engineering analysis to evaluate the performance of each menu item based on two main indicators: popularity level (Menu Mix Percentage) and profitability level (Contribution Margin). Based on the calculation results, each menu item was classified into four categories: Stars, Plowhorses, Puzzles, and Dogs. These classifications served as the foundation for determining more effective menu management strategies.

3. SWOT Analysis

The final stage involved applying SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to formulate menu development strategies. This analysis was developed based on the results of Menu Engineering, culinary heritage identification, field observations, interviews, documentation, and customer review information. The integration of these three approaches generated strategic recommendations aimed at optimizing menu performance while strengthening the value of Indonesian culinary heritage at Restaurant A.

RESEARCH RESULT

This study analyzed 75 menu items available at Restaurant A, consisting of 27 daytime menus, 43 nighttime menus, and 5 dessert items. Among the total menu offerings, 53 items were identified as Indonesian traditional menus and subsequently analyzed using the Menu Engineering method based on two main indicators: popularity level (Menu Mix Percentage) and profitability (Contribution Margin). The results of the analysis indicate that the Plowhorse category had the highest number of menu items, consisting of 27 items (36%),

followed by the Star category with 22 items (29%), Puzzle with 15 items (20%), and **Dog** with 11 items (15%). These findings indicate that most menu items have achieved good customer acceptance; however, further optimization is still required to improve profitability performance.

NO	MENU ITEM NAME	NUMBER OF ITEM SALES PERIOD										MENU MIX (%)	FOOD COST	FOOD COST PRICE	FOURTH	NETT LIST	GROSS PROFIT	CONTRIBUTION	CONTRIBUTION	CONTRIBUTION	
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th										
1	Lemon Bal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
2	Longkong Red Tomato	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	27%	70.000	0.000	20.000	14.000.000	14.000.000	14.000.000	14.000.000		
3	Longkong Lada Hitam	47	47	44	36	32	36	41	36	36	47	49%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
4	Agave Bata	40	33	30	44	40	30	30	30	44	40	13%	7.000	0.000	0.000	2.800.000	2.800.000	2.800.000	2.800.000		
5	Beau Ploche Bawala	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	19%	20.000	0.000	20.000	12.000.000	12.000.000	12.000.000	12.000.000		
6	Resolusi Top	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	14%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
7	Maya Bata	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	14%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
8	Longkong Bata	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	14%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
9	Longkong Bata	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	14%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
10	Longkong Bata	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	14%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000	0.000.000		
TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEM SALES PERIOD												100%	TOTAL FOOD COST		2,085,027.668	TOTAL REVENUE		9,890,230.000	TOTAL PROFIT		7,805,202.332
TOTAL OF MENU ITEM												53	TOTAL SALES		44,044	TOTAL GROSS PROFIT		7,805,202.332	TOTAL CONTRIBUTION		7,805,202.332

Figure 2. Draft Menu Engineering Analysis Worksheet of Restaurant A
Source: Processed Data, 2026

The results of the Menu Engineering Worksheet analysis demonstrate the performance of each menu item based on sales quantity, food cost, selling price, contribution margin, and menu mix percentage. This analysis served as the basis for classifying menu items into the Star, Plowhorse, Puzzle, and Dog categories. Furthermore, the summary of cost, revenue, profit, and sales indicates that a high sales volume does not always generate a high level of profitability. Therefore, menu evaluation should simultaneously consider popularity and profitability aspects to ensure that menu development decisions are made objectively and based on empirical data.

TOTAL			
Cost	Revenue	Profit	Sales
2,085,027,668	9,890,230,000	7,805,202,332	44,044

Figure 3. Cost, Revenue, Profit, and Sales Recapitulation

Based on the menu category recapitulation during lunch and dinner periods, a relatively similar distribution pattern was identified. During the lunch period, the Plowhorse category dominated with 37%, followed by Star at 27%, Puzzle at 21%, and Dog at 15%. Meanwhile, during the dinner period, Plowhorse remained the largest category with 38%, followed by Star at 30%, Puzzle at 19%, and Dog at 14%. This condition indicates that most menu items have high popularity levels; however, their profit contributions remain suboptimal, requiring strategies such as price adjustments, food cost control, and enhancement of menu value propositions.

The analysis focusing on 53 Indonesian traditional menu items revealed that the Plowhorse category remained dominant, consisting of 22 menu items (42%), followed by the Star category with 14 items (26%), Puzzle with 11 items (21%), and Dog with 6 items (11%). The dominance of the Plowhorse and Star categories indicates that Indonesian traditional menus have received strong customer acceptance and represent one of Restaurant A's primary strengths. Nevertheless, several menu items still require strategic development to improve profitability and increase customer appeal.

The sales performance analysis also revealed differences among menu items. Several dishes, including Soto Ayam, Signature Sate Lilit, Bebek Goreng Klungkung, and Sate Ayam Madura, were classified as Star items due to their high popularity and profitability levels. Conversely, menus such as Sayur Lodeh, Tongseng Lamb, and Kuwe (Pompano) were categorized as Dog items, indicating low sales performance and limited profit contribution. Based on these findings, Star-category menus are recommended to be maintained as signature dishes, while Dog-category menus require further evaluation through recipe improvement, promotional strategies, or menu repositioning.

In addition to evaluating financial performance, this study assessed the cultural value of each menu item through the Culinary Heritage Performance Checklist, consisting of 18 indicators covering cultural heritage aspects, regional identity, and tourism value. Each fulfilled indicator was assigned a score of 1, while unfulfilled indicators received a score of 0, resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 18 for each menu item. Based on the assessment results, menu items with scores ranging from 9 to 18 were categorized as Culinary Heritage, while scores ranging from 0 to 8 were categorized as Non-Culinary Heritage.

No.	Menu	Dimensi (2)	Tahapan dalam Proses Culinary Heritage (3)	Atribut / Karakteristik	Makna Konseptual	SCORE (If Qualified=1, If Not Qualified=0)	TOTAL SCORE	CATEGORY
1	Asinan Bogor	Place	Sourcing	Geographical origin	Memiliki asal wilayah yang jelas	1	18	CULINARY HERITAGE
				Local ingredients	Menggunakan bahan-bahan lokal	1		
				Recipe	Memiliki resep, sejarah & imajinasi	1		
		Legacy + People	Preparation	Regional identity	Mengandung identitas daerah	1		
				Local knowledge	Memiliki pengetahuan tentang budaya lokal	1		
				Embedded in local food system	Terintegrasi dalam sistem pangan lokal	1		
		Legacy + People + Place	Cooking	Authenticity	Keaslian resep, bahan, dan teknik	1		
				Traditional recipe	Resep tradisional yang diwariskan	1		
				Historical authenticity	Memiliki keaslian sejarah	1		
		Serving	Consumption	Knowledge transmission	Transfer pengetahuan antar generasi	0		
				Global authenticity	Pasar patung kuliner sebagai tempat wisata	1		
				Traditional processing methods	Metode pengolahan tradisional	1		

Figure 4. Culinary Heritage Performance Checklist

TOTAL	KATEGORI
0-8	NON - CULINARY HERITAGE
9-18	CULINARY HERITAGE

Figure 5. Culinary Heritage Assessment Categories

The evaluation results showed that among the 35 Indonesian traditional menus assessed, 28 menu items (80%) were categorized as Culinary Heritage, while 7 menu items (20%) were classified as Non-Culinary Heritage. Menu items such as Lawar Bali, Pecel Pincuk Madiun, Soto Ayam, Rendang, Signature Sate Lilit, and Ayam Woku achieved the highest scores because they fulfilled most culinary heritage indicators, including the use of local ingredients, traditional preparation techniques, regional identity, and cultural values embedded within the dishes. Conversely, menus such as Nasi Campur, Nasi Goreng Kampung, Singkong Lada Garam, and Jagung Bakar obtained lower scores because several culinary heritage indicators were not fully met.

The integration of Menu Engineering results with the Culinary Heritage Performance assessment demonstrates that menu development should consider not only popularity and profitability aspects but also the cultural values

associated with each menu item. Menu items categorized as Star with high Culinary Heritage scores should be maintained as signature menus because they contribute to financial performance while strengthening the identity of Indonesian cuisine at Restaurant A. Meanwhile, Plowhorse menu items should be optimized through food cost control or price adjustments without compromising product quality. Puzzle menu items require promotional strategies, storytelling approaches, and stronger cultural positioning to increase customer awareness, whereas Dog menu items, particularly those with low Culinary Heritage scores, should be considered for modification or replacement with alternatives that better align with market preferences. These findings demonstrate that integrating Menu Engineering and Culinary Heritage analysis can serve as a foundation for developing menu strategies that not only improve restaurant business performance but also support the preservation of Indonesian culinary heritage.

The SWOT analysis indicates that Restaurant A possesses strengths in the dominance of Plowhorse (42%) and Star (26%) menu categories, as well as the achievement of Culinary Heritage classification among 28 out of 35 evaluated menu items, thereby strengthening its Indonesian culinary identity. However, several menu items still demonstrate low profitability and have not fully met culinary heritage indicators. Meanwhile, increasing tourist interest in local cuisine provides opportunities to strengthen storytelling-based promotional strategies, although restaurant competition and fluctuations in raw material prices remain significant challenges. Therefore, the recommended strategies include optimizing menu profitability, strengthening culinary heritage values, and evaluating low-performing menu items to enhance Restaurant A's competitiveness.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Menu Engineering provides a comprehensive overview of menu performance at Restaurant A based on popularity and profitability levels. Among the 75 menu items analyzed, the Plowhorse category dominated the results, followed by the Star, Puzzle, and Dog categories, indicating that most menu items have achieved good customer acceptance but still require optimization in terms of profitability. The results of the Culinary Heritage Performance Checklist further indicate that the majority of Indonesian traditional menus possess characteristics of culinary heritage, demonstrating significant potential to strengthen the restaurant's culinary identity while enhancing its attractiveness to tourists. Based on the integration of Menu Engineering, the Culinary Heritage Performance Checklist, and SWOT analysis, this study concludes that menu development strategies should not solely focus on improving profitability but should also emphasize the preservation of cultural values through strengthening Indonesian culinary identity. Such an integrated approach can support the creation of sustainable competitive advantages for Restaurant A.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should develop an integrated model combining Menu Engineering, Culinary Heritage indicators, and digital customer analytics to optimize both profitability and cultural preservation. Longitudinal studies across different restaurants and tourism destinations are needed to examine how Indonesian culinary heritage influences customer loyalty, willingness to pay, and sustainable competitive advantage.

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