

# Unveiling Sushi, a High-Quality Unique and Aesthetic Culinary

Ni Desak Made Santi Diwyartha  
Politeknik Pariwisata Bali and [santidiwyartha@yahoo.com](mailto:santidiwyartha@yahoo.com)

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## ABSTRAK

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Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif tentang hidangan sushi, menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi berdasarkan pengalaman dalam pembuatan sushi, wawancara mendalam, dan studi literatur. Untuk mengurangi bias subjektif dalam penelitian kualitatif, digunakan metode triangulasi data berdasarkan teori Moleong. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sushi menghadapi kendala dalam hal kekurangan dan hambatan terhadap perkembangan global. Sushi memiliki aspek kekuatan dan kelemahan. Sushi memiliki peluang untuk berkembang secara maksimal dengan menerapkan teknologi yang inovatif. Aspek unik dan estetika dari sushi meliputi variasi bahan, persiapan dalam nasi, presentasi, gaya penyajian, signifikansi budaya, variasi musim, keterampilan dan teknik, rasa umami, kustomisasi, dan pengalaman makan.

*Kata Kunci: Estetika, Kuliner, Kualitas, Unik, Sushi*

## ABSTRACT

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This research is a qualitative study on sushi dishes, using a phenomenological approach based on experiences in sushi preparation, deep interview, and literature study. To reduce subjective bias in qualitative research, data triangulation method based on Moleong's theory is employed. The research findings indicate that sushi faces constraints in terms of shortages and obstacles to global development. Sushi has the strength and the weaknesses' aspect. Sushi has the opportunity for maximum growth by implementing innovative technologies. The unique and aesthetic aspects of sushi include the variety of ingredients, the preparation in rice, the presentation, the serving style, the cultural significance the seasonal variation, the skill and technique, the umami flavour, customization, and eating experience.

*Keywords: Aesthetic, Culinary, Quality, Unique, Sushi*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sushi has become one of Japan's most globally recognized culinary legacies. The unique combination of flavours, aesthetics, and skill in its preparation has made it popular in many countries. However, before sushi became a global icon, it had a long history that began in Japan. By studying its origins, we can understand how this food spread worldwide (Soares, 2013). Sushi has a long history originating from Japan. Initially, sushi was a traditional dish consisting of rice preserved with vinegar, salt, and sugar, which was then combined with other ingredients such as fresh fish or seafood. However, over time, sushi techniques and variations have evolved to become more complex and diverse. The consumption of sushi worldwide has rapidly increased in recent decades, with its popularity spreading to various countries beyond Japan. Sushi has become one of the most internationally recognized and sought-after Japanese foods (Maheswari, 2019).



Photo 1. Sushi

Source: Santi Diwyarthi, 2024

The history of sushi dates back to the early 4th century AD in Japan. Initially, sushi was not the same as what we know today. According to research by culinary historian Hiroshi Kagata, published in his article in *Asian Folklore Studies* in 1991, sushi first emerged as a method of preserving fish using fermented rice. This fermentation process provided an acidic taste that helped preserve the fish (Trahutami, 2018). Sushi continued to evolve over time. By the 7th century, Japan began using rice vinegar as a substitute for fermented rice to preserve fish. This technique imparted a fresher and more acidic taste, paving the way for sushi as we know it today (Soares, 2013).

The history of Sushi was explained by Eric C. Rath, a culinary historian. Rath researched the history of sushi, in his work published in *The Cambridge World History of Food* in 2000. He said, sushi was initially consumed as fast food served in roadside stalls in Edo (now Tokyo) (Annisa, 2015). However, with the rise of merchant classes and middle-class officials during the Edo period (1603-1868), sushi began to be valued more and considered a luxury food. In the 19th century, sushi underwent a major revolution with the introduction of freezing technology, which allowed fresh fish to be stored in better conditions. This enabled sushi to be sold outside of Japan without losing its freshness (Octaviana, Sudiksa and Utama, 2020). According to Theodore C. Bestor, an anthropologist studying Japanese food culture, in his article published in the journal *American Ethnologist* in 2000, globalization in the 20th century played a significant role in spreading sushi outside of Japan. Japanese restaurants began opening branches in major cities worldwide, introducing sushi to international audiences (Annisa, 2015).

Today, sushi has become one of the most popular Japanese foods in the world. According to the International Sushi Association, the number of sushi restaurants outside of Japan has rapidly increased in recent decades, with branches spread across almost every country. However, sushi's popularity is not limited to Japanese restaurants. Sushi has been adapted to local tastes in various countries, resulting in unique variations such as fusion sushi and vegetarian sushi. The history of sushi reflects the relationship between culture, technology, and globalization. From simple fish preservation methods to a global culinary phenomenon, sushi's journey has inspired many to explore and appreciate Japan's cultural richness. With various culinary technologies and innovations, sushi remains relevant in catering to the ever-changing food preferences worldwide (Waladouw, Sondakh and Kapojos, 2014). Sushi is a famous Japanese dish worldwide, typically consisting of rice shaped into small clumps and topped with various ingredients such as fresh fish, seafood, eggs, vegetables, or meat, often served with wasabi, ginger, and soy sauce. The sushi-making process involves special skills in cooking rice and selecting fresh, high-quality ingredients.

There has been a lot of research about sushi, but this research was interesting and important because examine sushi from Gen Z's perspective from culinary art study program. This research aims to examine sushi from the perspective of observations and preparations by Triana et al., Gen Z students from Bali Polytechnic of Tourism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sushi is a culinary tradition and cultural icon. Hiroko Shimbo (2014) delves sushi into the history, making techniques, and the role of sushi in Japanese culture. He wrote an article covers the evolution of sushi types, differences between traditional and modern sushi, and its significance in Japanese cuisine (Soares, 2013). Takeshi Nakano discusses sushi in quality assessment of Sushi Rice. His comprehensive study proved the quality of sushi rice by analyzing factors such as moisture, amylose content, and rice texture (Ayu Putu Hemy Ekayani, Purwanatha and Damiati, 2023). They also provides practical guidance for sushi makers in selecting suitable rice (Kamila and Gusnadi, 2018).

A research conducted by Yoko Tanaka about health benefits and risks of consuming sushi. He made a comprehensive review of current literature about sushi (2020) Yoko Tanaka presented a literature review regarding the health benefits and risks of sushi consumption. he discussed the nutritional content in sushi, the potential exposure to mercury in raw fish, and its impacts on consumer health (Soares, 2013). Kenji Yamamoto conducted a research about sustainability practices in sushi supply chains, challenges and opportunities (2018). He discussed the challenges and opportunities in sustainable practices within sushi supply chains. He made comprehensive reviews about the roles of fishermen, producers, sushi restaurants, and consumers in preserving sustainable marine resources (Dandi, 2014).

An article about the art of sushi making, techniques, skills, and tradition, was written by Hiroshi Sato (2020). Sato provides a comprehensive guide on sushi-making techniques, including selecting quality ingredients, fish cutting techniques, and aesthetic presentation. He proposed the understanding of the skills and traditions in sushi making (Trahutami, 2018). There is always a dynamic innovation in sushi industry. Yamada (2019) explain the trends and challenges". Yamada analyses innovations in the sushi industry, such as the use of technology in production processes, menu variations, and adaptation to consumer demands. This journal describes the dynamics of change in the sushi industry. Kobayashi (2017) explained cultural significance of sushi in contemporary society. Kobayashi discusses the cultural significance of sushi in contemporary society, including its role in popular culture, media, and the tourism industry. Kobayashi illustrated how sushi is not only a dish but also a symbol of Japanese culture spread worldwide. Sushi has relevance in terms of cultural appropriation and globalization world. Hiroshi Sato explained and compared sushi in a critical analysis (2017). He conducted a critical analysis of cultural appropriation and globalization phenomena in the context of sushi. His research

discussed the conflicts between sushi's popularity in the international arena and the protection of culinary heritage and Japanese identity (Trahutami, 2018).

From these theoretical studies, it can be concluded that sushi is not just a dish but also a symbol of culture, culinary expertise, and sustainability challenges. Studies continue to evolve to understand the technical, nutritional, health, environmental, and social aspects related to the consumption and production of sushi at both local and global levels.

## METHODS

Qualitative research method involving exploration of personal experiences, also known as qualitative research, aims to understand and explain phenomena through the perspective of individuals who directly experience them (Tobing, Herdiyanto and Astiti, 2016) and (Imam, 2013). In the context of sushi, we can employ this method to comprehend how individuals explore, consume, and understand sushi. The steps utilized in qualitative research method involving phenomenological exploration of experiences include: data collection from interviews and participant observations, as well as literature reviews, data analysis involving theme and concept mapping, comparative analysis, and drawing conclusions (Iii and Pendekatan, 2016).

The steps of data analysis techniques for qualitative research include: data collection (interviews, observations, and analysis of various journals), data analysis (identification of various dominant themes, concept mapping, and conducting comparative analysis), interpretation and conclusion (meaning interpretation and drawing conclusions).

1. Data Collection
  - a. Personal Interviews: Conducting interviews with individuals who have significant experience with sushi (Smith, 2005).
  - b. Participatory Observation: Observing individuals while they enjoy sushi to understand their interaction with the food and their surroundings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).
  - c. Personal Journals: Encouraging individuals to create journals about their experiences with sushi (Maxwell, 2013).
2. Data Analysis
  - a. Main Themes: Identifying dominant themes in individuals' experiences with sushi (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
  - b. Concept Mapping: Linking various aspects of sushi experiences expressed by individuals (Charmaz, 2014).
  - c. Comparative Analysis: Comparing individuals' experiences from different backgrounds and cultures to identify common patterns and differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
3. Interpretation and Conclusion
  - a. Meaning Interpretation: Interpreting the meanings contained within individuals' experiences with sushi (Ezzy, 2013).

- b. Drawing Conclusions: Drawing conclusions about the implications of findings on our understanding of sushi as a cultural and culinary phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Through this method, researchers can gain deeper insights into how sushi is understood and valued in various cultural and social contexts (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION



Figure 1. Sushi by Triana et al., 2024

Currently, sushi has become one of the favourite foods for many people around the world. Not only delicious and healthy, but sushi also has its own appeal with its attractive visuals and unique flavours. Sushi refers to a traditional Japanese dish consisting of two parts, namely rice (shari) and the toppings placed on top of the rice (neta). The rice used for shari typically consists of Japanese rice mixed with sugar and vinegar, giving it a slightly sweet and tangy taste. Meanwhile, neta commonly consists of various seafood, eggs, and vegetables, both raw and cooked (Trahutami, 2018).

The wealth of sushi variations allows us to try many types of sushi. Here are some famous types of sushi. Nigirizushi may be the most famous and common type of sushi. This sushi consists of neta served on top of oval-shaped rice balls. There is also sushi where the rice and fillings are rolled in nori or seaweed. This type of sushi is known as makizushi or makimono. Sushi with fillings and seaweed wrapped around the rice is called uramaki. Temakizushi is also sushi served with nori. Instead of being wrapped in a tube shape, the rice and fillings are wrapped in nori and formed into cones (Dandi, 2014).



Photo 3. Sushi

Source: Santi Diwyarthi, 2024

The qualitative research method aims to understand phenomena or issues in depth, complexity, and context. This approach seeks a deeper understanding of how and why a phenomenon occurs, focusing on interpretation, meaning, and social context. According to experts cited in the journal, qualitative research often involves collecting diverse data sources such as interviews, observations, and document analysis to gain a deep understanding of the researched phenomenon. This approach puts researchers directly in the field, allowing them to engage in direct interaction with participants and the researched context. The goals of qualitative research vary but generally include deep understanding of the researched phenomena, uncovering inherent meanings, developing theories or new concepts, and providing rich perspectives and nuances on a given issue.

The steps involved in uncovering the uniqueness and aesthetic value of sushi using qualitative research methods include determining the scope of the study, collecting data, analyzing data, interpreting data, drawing conclusions, and reporting findings. In this study, the scope of research is limited to specific dishes like sushi, focusing on aspects such as aesthetics, cultural values, or preparation techniques. Data collection methods may involve in-depth interviews with sushi experts, direct observation at sushi restaurants, or literature analysis on the history and culture of sushi. Data analysis is conducted using qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis or narrative analysis to identify patterns, themes, and meanings related to the uniqueness and aesthetic value of sushi dishes. The interpretation of findings aims to gain a deep understanding of the uniqueness and aesthetic value of sushi within the cultural, historical, and culinary context of Japan. Drawing conclusions involves summarizing findings related to the process of making and expressing the uniqueness and aesthetic value of sushi dishes. Discussions confirm the implications of findings for understanding sushi and its potential applications in other contexts, such as the culinary industry or cultural research. Reporting findings involves presenting research results in appropriate formats, such as presentations or papers, following the methodology used.

Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature studies are three different yet complementary methods in qualitative research on a product such as sushi. Each method has its benefits. Participant observation allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the practices and contexts related to sushi dishes. In-depth interviews provide direct perspectives from various stakeholders, such as sushi chefs, restaurant owners, food critics, or loyal customers. Literature studies enable researchers to understand the historical, cultural, and culinary contexts surrounding sushi dishes. By combining these methods, researchers can gain a richer and deeper understanding

of the uniqueness and aesthetic value of sushi, as well as the cultural and practical contexts surrounding it.

Based on the research, the unique and aesthetic aspects of sushi includes the variety of ingredients, the preparation in rice, the presentation, the serving style, the cultural significance the seasonal variation, the skill and technique, the umami flavour, customization, and eating experience. Variety of ingredients aspect shows Sushi offers a wide range of ingredients, from fresh fish like salmon, tuna, and eel to vegetarian options like cucumber, avocado, and tofu. This variety allows for diverse flavor profiles and textures. Rice preparation show the rice used in sushi, known as shari or sumeshi, is seasoned with a mixture of vinegar, sugar, and salt. The precise preparation of the rice is crucial to achieving the perfect balance of flavors in sushi.

Presentation of sushi is not only valued for its taste but also for its aesthetic presentation. Chefs often arrange sushi on plates in visually appealing patterns, using vibrant colors and artistic garnishes. Serving style of sushi can be served in various styles, including nigiri (sliced fish atop a small bed of rice), maki (rolled sushi), sashimi (sliced fish served without rice), and temaki (hand-rolled sushi cones). Each style offers a unique dining experience.

Cultural significance of sushi holds significant cultural importance in Japan, where it is considered a symbol of artistry, tradition, and hospitality. It has also gained popularity worldwide, becoming an iconic dish representing Japanese cuisine. Seasonal variations aspect show sushi chefs often incorporate seasonal ingredients into their creations, reflecting the availability of fresh produce and seafood throughout the year. This ensures that sushi remains a dynamic and ever-evolving culinary experience. Skill and technique aspect show crafting sushi requires a high level of skill and precision. Sushi chefs undergo years of training to master techniques such as knife skills, rice preparation, and fish selection to create perfectly balanced and flavorful dishes.

Umami flavor of sushi shows sushi is known for its rich umami flavor, which is derived from ingredients like soy sauce, seaweed, and fermented fish products such as soy sauce and miso. Umami adds depth and complexity to sushi's taste profile. Customization of sushi can be customized to suit individual preferences and dietary restrictions. Customers can request specific ingredients, omit allergens, or choose from a variety of vegetarian and vegan options, making sushi accessible to a wide range of diners.

Eating experience of sushi show enjoying sushi is not just about eating; it's also about the experience. Traditionally, sushi is eaten with chopsticks or fingers, dipped in soy sauce, and complemented with pickled ginger and wasabi. The interactive nature of dining on sushi adds to its appeal and enjoyment. Sushi cuisine boasts several strengths that cannot be ignored. Firstly, sushi utilizes fresh ingredients such as fish, vegetables, and rice. This provides a competitive advantage for sushi businesses in terms of product quality. Secondly, sushi offers endless flavour and type variations, from maki rolls to nigiri and sashimi. This flexibility allows customers to choose according to their preferences. Another strength is the enticing visual presentation of sushi, which attracts potential customers in this social media era.

This description support Trahutami's theory discusses the nutritional content in sushi, the potential exposure to mercury in raw fish, and its impacts on consumer health (Trahutami, 2018). There are opportunities of sushi that can be utilized such as the development of healthy food trends, increasing interest in Japanese culture. Continuously experimenting with flavors and attractive

visual presentations to tap into another unique and aesthetic sushi. Hopefully, courage in trying and hard work will lead sushi became high qualified presentation of success in the global market.

## CONCLUSION

Sushi has the unique and authentic aspects: ingredient variety, rice preparation, presentation, serving style, cultural significance, seasonal variations, skill and technique, umami flavour, customization, and eating experience. Ingredient variety includes offers diverse options like fresh fish, vegetables, and tofu. Rice preparation includes seasoned with vinegar, sugar, and salt for flavor. Presentation includes arranged artistically with vibrant colors and garnishes. Serving styles includes nigiri, maki, sashimi, and temaki offer varied experiences. Cultural significance such as symbolizes artistry and hospitality in Japan and globally. Seasonal variations include incorporates fresh, seasonal ingredients. Skill and technique includes requires precision in knife skills and fish selection. Umami flavour such as rich taste derived from ingredients like soy sauce and seaweed. Customization that can be tailored to preferences and dietary needs. Eating experience shows interactive dining with chopsticks, soy sauce, ginger, and wasabi.

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This research is an ongoing study that is not yet complete, thus requiring various in-depth investigations using different sushi processing techniques and ingredients from various chefs and other regions.

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