

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Pecel semanggi is a traditional dish from Surabaya made primarily from clover leaves (*Marsilea crenata*) that are boiled or steamed, then drizzled with a distinctive sauce made from peanuts, cassava, palm sugar, and tamarind, featuring a slightly coarse texture, and served on a banana leaf with puli crackers used as a substitute for a spoon (Syerinatasya & Septiani, 2024). This dish originates from Kampung Kendung, Sememi Village, Benowo Subdistrict, West Surabaya, now known as Kampoeng Semanggi. The origins of pecel semanggi are closely tied to the creative ideas of the local residents at the time. According to Kurniawati & Gunansyah (2019), the city of Surabaya in the past had vast rice fields overgrown with weeds, one of which was semanggi. Farmers addressed this by processing semanggi into food by steaming or boiling it. This dish shares similarities with other pecel dishes, namely vegetables drizzled with a peanut sauce. However, what sets pecel semanggi apart from typical pecel is its sauce, which is made from peanuts with the addition of sweet potatoes and cassava (Al-Ansori et al., 2019).



Figure 1. 1 Pecel semanggi Surabaya, 2025
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Pecel semanggi has a rather unique sales method. According to an interview with one of the pecel semanggi vendors in Kampung Semanggi, Rini (2025), semanggi vendors fall into two categories: stationary vendors and mobile vendors. Mobile vendors typically set out carrying baskets as early as five in the morning to take a minibus, then go around selling their

wares and return home by midday. Meanwhile, Semanggi vendors who stay in one place sell during times when people have free time, such as on Saturdays and Sundays. Rini (2025) also explained that, aside from Kampoeng Semanggi, Pecel semanggi can also be found in the surrounding areas, such as the Bukit Palma Housing Complex, the Kendung neighborhood, and around the Akbar Mosque in Surabaya. Pecel semanggi can also be found at several car-free day (CFD) locations in Surabaya (Anisa M, 2025). However, semanggi vendors are not always found in various places across Surabaya; they are only present at specific locations.

This dish has also achieved a notable milestone. According to the Surabaya Library and Archives Office (2020), pecel semanggi was officially recognized as part of Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTB) in 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. This dish was registered with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology under registration number 2012002369 in 2012. This recognition proves that pecel semanggi is not only a signature dish that represents Surabaya but also an important part of the cultural heritage that must be preserved.



Figure 1. 2 Certificate of Recognition for Pecel Semanggi as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), 2022
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Nevertheless, pecel semanggi faces the challenge of scarcity. According to Detik.com, one of the causes is that the supply of clover has become increasingly difficult to obtain due to extreme weather and pests (Yovita, 2025). These factors have made clover increasingly difficult to find, so that pecel semanggi vendors cannot obtain enough raw materials to process and sell. Another factor is the large amount of clover land being cleared for development and residential use, explained Yovita in Detik.com (2025).

The declining number of pecel semanggi vendors is also a factor threatening the survival of this culinary tradition. As noted in a report by Najibah & Wadrianto on Kompas.com (2024), the decline in the number of semanggi vendors—a group predominantly made up of older generations—is due to the younger generation’s lack of interest in continuing the pecel semanggi business. Loji, Head of RT 7 Kampoeng Semanggi, added that the pecel semanggi business is usually passed down to children and grandchildren. However, the younger generation’s interest in traditional cuisine has declined due to globalization and a shift in preferences toward cuisines considered “trendy” that originate from abroad, as explained by Masruroh in Kumparan.com (2025).

Based on survey data from 82 young respondents aged 18–25 on October 5, 2025, 57.3% of respondents were familiar with pecel semanggi, while 42.7% of respondents were not familiar with it, citing reasons such as the scarcity of vendors selling pecel semanggi in the area (46.3% of respondents), the dish not being widely promoted (39% of respondents), and the difficulty in finding vendors selling pecel semanggi (28% of respondents).

In response to these phenomena and challenges, new innovations have emerged as part of efforts to preserve the culinary tradition of pecel semanggi. In an interview conducted by the author with Loji, the head of RT 7 in Kampoeng Semanggi, on October 3, 2025, it was explained that Kampung Kendung was officially designated as a village dedicated to the cultivation of semanggi, and renamed Kampoeng Semanggi in 2017 by the then-Mayor of Surabaya, Tri Rismaharini (Rizqiyah in Good News From Indonesia, 2024). The government is also working to empower semanggi farmers who lack sufficient land by lending them plots located near Kampoeng Semanggi for semanggi cultivation, ensuring that semanggi farming can continue (author’s interview with Syahrul, October 15, 2025). In addition, the local community is also trying to increase the supply of clover leaves by cultivating them on small plots of land. Loji (in an interview on October 3, 2025) also added that farmers deal with pests such as leafhoppers and caterpillars by using pesticides.

Based on the previous explanation, there is currently no solution to increase the number of pecel semanggi vendors. Loji noted that there were 127 pecel semanggi vendors in 2025 (researcher’s interview with Loji, 2025). This number is claimed to have decreased compared to previous years. This is because the younger generation is reluctant to continue the semanggi vendor business, citing that it requires significant effort and is exhausting due to the method of

selling by carrying the food on one's back (Rinda in Najibah & Wadrianto, 2024). In fact, the pecel semanggi culinary tradition requires the involvement of the younger generation to preserve this cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

According to Santrock (2010: 19–20), late adolescence begins around age 18 and extends to around age 25—a period during which individuals begin to form their self-identity, search for meaning in life, and determine their lifestyle, career, and cultural orientation. Therefore, cultural preservation efforts should target this age group, as they are the next generation who will carry on the culture in the future.

Introducing local culture through engaging media can be an effective means of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the culinary dish “pecel semanggi” to young people using the appropriate media, as explained by Santrock (2010: 399), who indicates that young people tend to spend most of their time with media. In this regard, the author conducted a survey to determine the intensity of respondents' media use on October 5, 2025. A total of 76.8% of respondents admitted to always using gadgets in their daily lives, with a higher proportion of usage dedicated to seeking entertainment (80.5% of respondents). Additionally, 52.4% of respondents spent their free time reading webcomics. From this survey data, it can be concluded that webcomics are the appropriate medium for introducing pecel semanggi cuisine to young people.

McCloud defines comics as a sequence of deliberately arranged images that serve to convey information while evoking an aesthetic response in the viewer (1993: 9). Comics are also a popular medium among young people because their images are attractive, easy to understand, and spark the imagination, as well as serving as a form of entertainment, making comics particularly popular among young people (Putro & Irwansyah, 2021). This is also supported by Maharsi's view, who explains that the primary readers of comics are young people aged 15 to 25 (2018: 6).

Comics have also evolved alongside technological advancements. McCloud (2000: 131–135) explains that the development of webcomics is a natural evolution of traditional comics that has grown alongside digital technology and the internet. Digital comics have evolved into a format with an unlimited vertical canvas, making message delivery more effective (McCloud, 2000: 220–223).

There are several platforms available today for accessing webcomics, such as Mangatoon, Line Webtoon, Tapas, Kakao Page, Bilibili Comics, Tappy Toon, and others. Among the platforms mentioned, the most popular one is Line Webtoon. This is evidenced by the fact that Line Webtoon ranks as the most frequently downloaded app and holds the number one spot in the free comics category on the Google Play Store, with a strong rating of 4.7 out of 5.

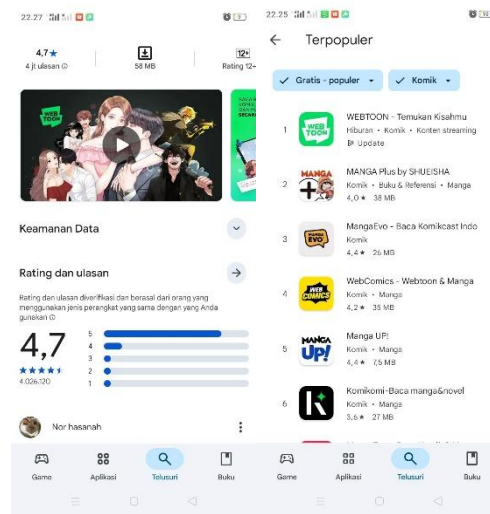


Figure 1. 3 The Line Webtoon app and its ratings, 2025
(Source: Google Playstore)

According to a survey conducted on October 5, 2025, regarding media preferences to determine which platforms respondents use, 91.5% of respondents prefer reading webcomics because they are easily accessible at any time and free of charge. Line Webtoon was selected as the most widely used platform (80.5% of respondents).

Thus, this project, which focuses on Surabaya’s pecel semanggi and utilizes Webtoon as its medium, is expected to introduce this dish to the younger generation so that it can be preserved and passed down.

1.2 Problem Identification

1. Limited availability of clover leaves (*Marsilea crenata*) due to extreme weather, pests, and land conversion for residential use, making it difficult for vendors to obtain the main ingredient for pecel semanggi (Yovita in Detik.com, 2025)

2. The declining number of water fern sellers, who are predominantly older generations, with no younger successors to carry on the business (Najibah & Wadrianto in Kompas.com, 2024)
3. Low interest and knowledge among the younger generation regarding traditional cuisine, particularly pecel semanggi, due to the rapid globalization of “trendy” cuisines originating from abroad (Masruroh in Kumparan.com, 2025)
4. Many young people are still unaware of the existence of pecel semanggi (42.7% of respondents), citing a lack of exposure (39%)

1.3 Research Question

The research question identified is: How should a webcomic about Surabaya’s pecel semanggi be designed for the 18–25 age group?

1.4 Scope of the Study

1. The research is limited to the traditional Surabaya pecel semanggi dish, covering its history, main ingredients, its role as a distinctive culinary identity of Surabaya, and efforts to preserve it
2. The designed medium is limited to a webcomic or digital comic to be published on Line Webtoon
3. The primary target audience is late teens to early adults aged 18–25
4. The comic’s content focuses on aspects of cultural introduction and preservation

1.5 Design Objectives

The design of the Pecel Semanggi webcomic aims to introduce and preserve Surabaya’s Pecel Semanggi cuisine among young people aged 18–25

1.6 Design Benefits

This design is expected to foster interest and awareness among the younger generation regarding traditional cuisine, particularly Surabaya’s pecel semanggi, through an engaging approach tailored to media preferences, specifically via the Line Webtoon platform.

1.7 Design Framework

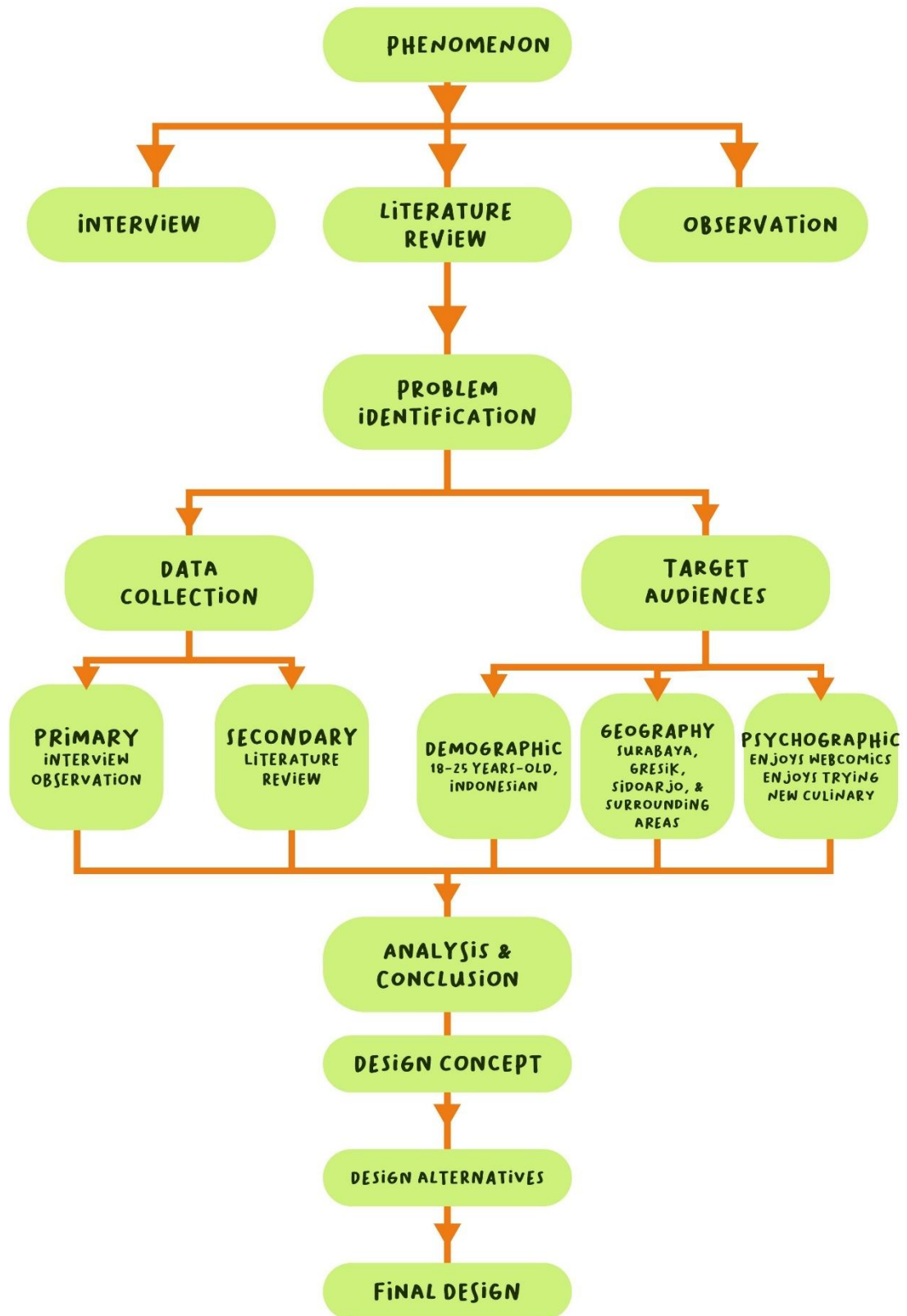


Figure 1. 4 Design Framework, 2025
(Source: Personal Documentation)