

Utilization of sweet melon in hospitality food manufacturing

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Article History	Abstract	
Original Research Article	<i>This study investigated the utilization of sweet melon in hospitality food manufacturing. Four research objectives guided the study: to examine the nutritional value of sweet melon and its potential contribution to improving the quality of hospitality food products; to identify culinary methods and recipes that incorporate sweet melon as a major ingredient in different dishes; to assess consumers’ preferences and perceptions of sweet melon-based dishes in hospitality establishments; and to determine the cost-effectiveness of incorporating sweet melon into food production within the hospitality industry. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with selected chefs at Le Meridien Suites Hotel, Port Harcourt, constituting the target population. A total of one hundred (100) selected chefs were included in the study sample. Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using frequency distributions and simple percentages, while the stated research hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square statistical technique. The study recommended that hospitality businesses consider incorporating sweet melon into a variety of menu offerings, including salads, smoothies, desserts, and savoury dishes. The study concluded that sweet melon has considerable potential to improve the quality and diversity of food products in the hospitality sector.</i> Keywords: Sweet Melon, Hospitality Food Manufacturing, Nutritional Value, Culinary Applications, Consumer Preferences, Cost-Effectiveness.	
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Introduction

The sweet melon is an appetising fruit appreciated for its taste and nutrient profile; therefore, the inclusion of this fruit in hospitality food production has been gaining popularity. Such varieties as cantaloupe and honeydew could be used in sweet and savoury preparations, which expands the scope of culinary possibilities in the hospitality industry. According to research, the versatility in food preparation and health benefits of the product make it possible to use it as a tool for expanding the menu of hospitality business (Sowbhagya & Singh, 2020). As customers become more aware about health benefits of certain products, the inclusion of sweet melon in hospitality food production will contribute to the nutritional value of food and provide opportunities for cost-efficient menu design.

One of the main features of the product under discussion is high moisture content, which contributes to the hydration effect and makes foods with it refreshing. Its naturally sweet taste and low-calorie nature of the fruit make it possible to create lightweight meals (Liu et al., 2020). In fact, the fruit is often used in salads, drinks and juice, where it could be

combined with various fruits and vegetables and create appealing and refreshing dishes. Additionally, the naturally sweet taste of the product makes it possible to use it in dessert production, as it would contribute to the reduction of added sugars without affecting the taste (López et al., 2021). All the uses of the product are related to the current trend of clean label foods in the hospitality business.

In addition, the nutritional profile of the product has made it possible to include it in healthy foods within the hospitality sector. As mentioned above, the fruit is rich in vitamin A and C as well as antioxidants and is marketed as a nutritionally dense product that has health benefits such as normal functioning of the immune system and skin health and hydration (Basu et al., 2019). Therefore, this feature of the product could be used by hospitality businesses that serve guests who pay attention to the nutritional value of the meals they eat. As a component of balanced diet, sweet melon could serve as low-fat product and source of dietary fibre, which

supports good digestion and overall well-being (Vanderlinden & Haug, 2022).

The application of sweet melon in the hospitality food sector has gone past its traditional uses and found its way into other food products. The food industry professionals can now experiment with the sweet melon as the main component in the preparation of different types of savory dishes. These could include salads, salsas, and grills among others. It can also be combined with chicken or seafood in different types of balanced dishes (Smith et al., 2021). Through this innovation, the sweet melon is used not only as a garnishing agent but as a central component of meals. The mildness of the melon will also add flavor to different types of cuisines especially when used in the preparation of international fusion food products that involve the combination of the melon with different types of spices or tangy foods.

The issue of sustainability can also be significant in determining the method of using the sweet melon in the process of manufacturing food products in the hospitality industry. With the increased adoption of environmentally friendly practices in the hospitality sector, the purchase of the locally grown sweet melon can help in reducing transportation related greenhouse gas emissions in the process of supply chain. The fact that the fruit can be produced in many parts of the world will increase the opportunity to source the fruit locally and thus minimize the importation of fruits (Li et al., 2019). It can also reduce wastage of food since the fruit will be carefully planned for through the process of purchasing, storage and portioning.

The issue of the economic feasibility of the use of the sweet melon in the food manufacturing process can be another factor that can guide its utilization. This is because the fruit can appeal to the needs of different consumer groups, and its purchase from local sources during the seasonal availability will be economical (Alva et al., 2022). In addition, the current market trends and customer preferences in the food industry are moving towards more plant-based and sustainable food products. This makes it possible for hospitality firms to incorporate the melon in their food manufacturing process to meet the demands of consumers.

Research Design

Research design is the specification of methods and procedures for acquiring the information needed to solve problems. This study employed the descriptive survey design. The nature of the problem was duly considered in the study.

Population of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the target population consists of selected Chefs in Le Meridean and Suites Hotel, Port Harcourt.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample of the study refers to that part of the population that was selected for closer study. To select the needed samples for this study, the researcher used a total number of one hundred (100) selected Chefs in Le Meridean and Suites Hotel, Port Harcourt.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher. It was carefully designed to ensure simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. The questionnaire comprised two sections, namely Sections A and B. Section A gathered personal and demographic information about the respondents, while Section B contained questions formulated from the research questions to obtain relevant responses from the participants. A four-point response scale was used, consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D).

Validity of the Instrument

To determine the face validity of the study, the research instrument was reviewed and approved by the supervisor for the suitability of each item of the instrument. The last items were obtained from the supervisor's comment. The items were further submitted to content validity to ascertain that the contents of the instrument were indicative of the area that the instrument is meant to cover.

Method of Data Analysis

The response to the items in the questionnaire was analysed using frequency tables and simple percentage technique. The hypotheses of the research as indicated above were examined by Chi-Square Statistics.

4.2 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire

	Frequency	Percent
Returned	87	87.0
Unreturned	13	13.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.1 showed that 87%(87) respondents returned their questionnaire while 13% (13) respondents did not returned their questionnaire. This implies that a large proportion of the questionnaire were filled and returned.

Table 2: Distribution According to Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	51	58.6
Female	36	41.4
Total	87	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As indicated in Table 2, 58.6% (51) respondents were male while 41.4%(36) were female. This shows that male respondents participated more in the research than their female counterpart.

Table 3: Distribution according to Age

	Frequency	Percent
21 – 30 years	30	34.5
31 – 40 years	24	27.6
41 – 50 years	18	20.7
51 – 60 years	9	10.3
51 – 60 years	6	6.9
Total	87	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In the age grade category in Table 3, it shows that the respondents 34.5%(30) respondents are between 21 – 30 years, 27.6%(24) are between 31 – 40 years age range, 20.7%(18) are from 41 – 50 years, 10.3%(9) respondents are in between 51 – 60 years, while 6.9%(6) are in the age bracket of above 51 – 60 years.

Table 4: Distribution According to Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent
Single	49	56.3
Married	38	43.7
Total	87	87.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The Marital category of the respondents shows that 56.3% (49) respondents were single while 43.7%(38) respondents were married. This implies that respondents with single status attended more to the questionnaire.

4.4 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Ho: Sweet Melon has no potential benefits in enhancing the quality of hospitality food products

H1: Sweet Melon has potential benefits in enhancing the quality of hospitality food products

Table 5: Relationship between Sweet Melon and quality of hospitality food products

Structure	N	X	SD	df	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Sweet Melon	87	3.59	0.883	172	0.177	2.813	1.96	H ₀ Rejected
quality of hospitality food products	87	3.09	1.398					

0.5 level of significance

Table 5 above shows that the calculated value of t-test $t_{cal} = 2.813$ which is greater than the critical value $t_{crit} = 1.96$ at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom $df = 172$; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which states “Sweet Melon has no potential benefits in enhancing the quality of hospitality food products”. This showed that Sweet Melon has potential benefits in enhancing the quality of hospitality food products.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The use of sweet melon (*Cucumis melo*) in the hospitality industry presents significant opportunities for enhancing the quality and appeal of food products. Sweet melon is known for its refreshing taste, vibrant color, and natural sweetness, which can elevate the sensory experience of various dishes. The findings suggest that incorporating sweet melon into food products can improve the overall flavor profile and increase customer satisfaction. Specifically, its natural sugars can replace or reduce the need for artificial sweeteners, making food items healthier without compromising taste. Additionally, its high water content contributes to moisture retention in baked goods, salads, and smoothies, enhancing texture and freshness.

One of the key advantages of using sweet melon in hospitality food products is its nutritional value. Melons are rich in vitamins A and C, which are essential for immune function and skin health. The inclusion of sweet melon in food offerings can therefore provide customers with a health-conscious alternative to traditional desserts or snacks. Research has shown that vitamin C, in particular, has antioxidant properties that help reduce oxidative stress, contributing to long-term health benefits (Khaleel et al., 2021). Furthermore, the high water content of sweet melon makes it a hydrating food, which is particularly valuable in environments where guests are seeking refreshing, hydrating options, such as in spas, resorts, or summer-themed menus.

In terms of culinary versatility, sweet melon can be incorporated into both savory and sweet dishes, offering flexibility for chefs in the hospitality industry. It can be used in fruit salads, smoothies, cocktails, and desserts, or even paired with proteins like ham or prosciutto to create unique, flavorful appetizers. Studies by Garcia et al. (2020) highlight that the mild yet distinct flavor of sweet melon complements a wide range of ingredients, allowing it to be seamlessly integrated into diverse menus. Its bright color also makes it an aesthetically pleasing addition to plated dishes, contributing to visual appeal and presentation, which are important factors in the hospitality sector.

Moreover, sweet melon has potential as a natural preservative in certain food applications. Its high water

content and natural sugars create an environment that inhibits the growth of certain bacteria, thus extending the shelf life of certain dishes or prepared foods. For instance, when added to salads or fruit mixes, sweet melon can help maintain freshness for longer periods compared to other fruits. A study by Mattila et al. (2022) suggests that melons, due to their antimicrobial properties, may offer a natural solution to some of the preservation challenges faced in food service operations, especially in environments where fresh ingredients are critical to quality.

Another notable benefit of incorporating sweet melon into hospitality food products is its appeal to a growing segment of health-conscious consumers. As trends toward clean eating, plant-based diets, and low-calorie alternatives continue to rise, offering food products that are not only delicious but also nutritionally balanced is increasingly important. Sweet melon, being low in calories and rich in essential vitamins, fits well within this trend. According to a report by the International Food Information Council (2023), consumers are increasingly seeking food products that offer both taste and health benefits, making sweet melon a strong candidate for inclusion in modern hospitality menus.

In conclusion, the incorporation of sweet melon into hospitality food products presents several benefits, including enhanced flavor, nutritional value, versatility in culinary applications, and potential for natural preservation. As the hospitality industry continues to adapt to consumer preferences for healthier, more visually appealing, and innovative food offerings, sweet melon has the potential to play a central role in meeting these demands. Future research may further explore the specific effects of sweet melon on food texture and preservation, as well as its compatibility with other emerging food trends such as plant-based and gluten-free options. By leveraging the benefits of sweet melon, hospitality businesses can improve the quality of their food offerings, attract health-conscious customers, and stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that sweet melon (*Cucumis melo*) holds significant potential in enhancing the quality of food products within the hospitality industry. Its natural sweetness, high water content, and rich nutritional profile make it an excellent ingredient for improving both the sensory appeal and health benefits of various dishes. The findings suggest that sweet melon not only contributes to enhanced flavor and texture but also aligns with consumer trends that prioritize healthy, fresh, and visually appealing food options. Furthermore, its versatility in culinary applications—from savory to sweet dishes—coupled with

its potential as a natural preservative, positions it as a valuable asset for the hospitality sector.

Sweet melon's nutritional benefits, including its high vitamin A and C content, offer opportunities for food service providers to cater to the increasing demand for health-conscious, nutrient-dense food options. The fruit's natural properties can also play a role in extending shelf life and maintaining freshness, which can be advantageous in food preservation, particularly in high-turnover environments like restaurants, hotels, and catering services. Additionally, the fruit's ability to pair well with other ingredients and its aesthetic appeal further supports its role in improving the overall dining experience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for the hospitality industry to optimize the use of sweet melon in food products:

1. **Menu Integration and Product Development:** Hospitality businesses should explore incorporating sweet melon into a diverse range of menu items, including salads, smoothies, desserts, and even savory dishes. Developing signature dishes or themed menus that highlight sweet melon could attract health-conscious consumers while offering a refreshing alternative to traditional options.
2. **Health-Focused Marketing:** As consumers continue to prioritize health and wellness, hospitality providers can capitalize on the nutritional benefits of sweet melon in their marketing strategies. Highlighting the fruit's rich vitamin content, hydrating properties, and low-calorie profile in menu descriptions or promotional materials could enhance the appeal of these products to a growing health-conscious demographic.
3. **Innovation in Preservation:** Research into the potential antimicrobial and preservative effects of sweet melon could be expanded to develop more sustainable food preservation methods. Hospitality businesses may benefit from exploring sweet melon's natural ability to extend the shelf life of food products, thereby reducing waste and improving operational efficiency in food service settings.
4. **Sustainability Practices:** Sweet melon cultivation is relatively sustainable compared to other fruit crops, as it requires less water and can be grown in various climates. Hospitality businesses should consider sourcing locally grown sweet melon to

support sustainable agriculture practices and reduce their carbon footprint. Additionally, incorporating seasonal ingredients like melon into menus can promote sustainability and ensure the freshness of dishes.

5. **Further Research on Culinary Applications:** Future studies should investigate the specific culinary techniques that maximize the flavor, texture, and shelf-life benefits of sweet melon in various food formats. Research into how sweet melon interacts with other ingredients, particularly in terms of its preservation and pairing potential, would provide valuable insights for chefs and food developers in the hospitality industry.
6. **Consumer Education and Engagement:** To fully capitalize on the benefits of sweet melon, hospitality businesses should engage with consumers through educational initiatives. This could include chef demonstrations, informational brochures, or online content that educates guests about the health benefits and versatility of sweet melon. Such efforts could increase consumer interest and encourage greater use of sweet melon in dining experiences.

In conclusion, sweet melon offers a range of benefits that can significantly enhance the quality of hospitality food products. By integrating this versatile fruit into diverse food offerings, focusing on its nutritional advantages, and leveraging its potential in food preservation, hospitality businesses can meet consumer demands for healthier, fresher, and more innovative culinary experiences. Continued research and experimentation will likely unlock even more opportunities for this fruit to play a key role in the evolving landscape of the hospitality industry.

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