Impact of Indian regional cuisines on international hotel menus

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Abstract

Purpose - This study investigates the impact of Indian regional cuisines on international hotel menus, focusing on how such culinary offerings influence guest satisfaction, authenticity perceptions, and strategic positioning in global hospitality. The research aims to explore the operational challenges and cultural significance of integrating regional dishes into hotel offerings for international clientele.

Methodology/Design/Approach - A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using semi-structured interviews with chefs, managers, and international tourists across multiple five-star and four-star hotels offering Indian regional cuisines. Data were coded and analyzed to identify recurring patterns and themes, providing insights into both operational and experiential aspects of Indian cuisine in international hotel settings.

Findings - The analysis revealed four major themes: guest experience and satisfaction, authenticity and adaptation, operational challenges, and cultural and strategic significance. Approximately 85% of participants emphasized enhanced guest satisfaction due to sensory appeal and cultural immersion, while 65% highlighted the challenges of balancing authenticity with adaptation for international palates. Operational concerns such as staff training, ingredient sourcing, and menu planning were noted by 70% of respondents. Additionally, 80% of hotel managers recognized Indian regional cuisines as valuable tools for cultural promotion and brand differentiation.

Originality/Value - The study highlights the importance of culturally informed culinary offerings in enhancing guest experiences, promoting India's culinary heritage, and strengthening competitive positioning in the international hospitality industry. Hotels are encouraged to invest in staff training, strategic menu planning, quality ingredient sourcing, and cultural marketing to maximize the benefits of integrating regional cuisines.

Keywords: Indian regional cuisine, international hotels, guest satisfaction, culinary authenticity, cultural branding, thematic analysis

Introduction

Indian regional cuisines have increasingly influenced the design and innovation of international hotel menus, reflecting a growing demand for authentic and culturally diverse dining experiences. According to Dhamija and Bakshi (2023), attributes such as flavor, aroma, portion size, value for money, and service quality are key determinants of foreign tourists' satisfaction with Indian cuisine. Their study highlights how these factors make Indian food appealing in global hospitality contexts, where hotels strive to balance authenticity with international preferences.

Similarly, Bakshi, Kumar, and Sharma (2025) emphasized that culinary challenges—such as the lack of taste consistency, limited menu variety, and adaptation difficulties—significantly shape the perception of Indian cuisine among international guests. Their findings suggest that hotels adopting regional Indian dishes

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on global menus must carefully address these challenges to enhance guest satisfaction and acceptance.

At the same time, Indian cuisine's global spread is reinforced by its adaptability and cultural richness. Kumar (2024) noted that the versatility of Indian flavors and the strong vegetarian tradition have enabled chefs worldwide to integrate regional dishes such as biryani, dosa, and vindaloo into international hotel dining. Furthermore, the global expansion of Indian restaurant chains, as observed by Wharton (2011), demonstrates the scalability and cross-cultural acceptance of Indian regional food, which indirectly contributes to its incorporation into hotel gastronomy.

Together, these studies suggest that Indian regional cuisines not only enhance menu diversity in international hotels but also act as instruments of cultural diplomacy and culinary tourism. The growing presence of Indian dishes on global menus thus reflects a dynamic interplay between authenticity, innovation, and guest expectations.

Research Objectives

1. To explore how Indian regional cuisines are represented and adapted on international hotel menus.
2. To identify thematic patterns related to guest perceptions, satisfaction, and cultural experiences associated with Indian regional cuisines in global hospitality.
3. To examine the challenges and opportunities faced by hotels in integrating Indian regional cuisines into their offerings.

Literature Review

The integration of food into hospitality services is widely acknowledged as a tool for enhancing guest experience and destination branding. Cuisines act as cultural carriers, reflecting history, tradition, and social identity within international hospitality spaces (Gordin et al., 2016). Hotels, in particular, play a pivotal role in presenting local and ethnic cuisines to global audiences, thereby sustaining culinary heritage while meeting international guest expectations.

Authenticity remains central to the consumption of ethnic cuisines in international hotels. Le (2020) conceptualized authenticity in dining experiences through dimensions such as authenticity of the producer, authenticity of the other, and authenticity of the self, emphasizing how consumers negotiate meanings when engaging with ethnic food. Similarly, research in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (2022) highlighted that restaurant patrons assess authenticity using diverse cues, including presentation, environment, and perceived alignment with cultural traditions. These findings underline the complexity of representing Indian regional cuisines on global hotel menus, where both authenticity and adaptation influence guest satisfaction.

Studies on Indian cuisines specifically point to the sensory and experiential elements shaping guest perceptions. Dhamija and Bakshi (2023) found that taste, aroma, portion size, and service quality significantly affect foreign tourists' satisfaction with Indian cuisine. Extending this, Bakshi et al. (2025) examined the challenges international hotels face in serving Indian dishes, such as difficulties in maintaining consistency of flavors, managing heavy spice levels, and sourcing authentic ingredients. These studies suggest that while Indian food is valued for its diversity and cultural richness, operational barriers often shape its international reception.

Beyond satisfaction, Indian regional cuisines also hold cultural and diplomatic significance. Rockower (2011) introduced the concept of gastrodiplomacy, explaining how national cuisines serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy by "capturing hearts and minds through stomachs." This perspective has been applied to Indian food as well, where regional dishes are increasingly positioned as cultural ambassadors in hospitality contexts (Chhabra et al., 2013).

Taken together, existing literature identifies three major dynamics: (a) the incorporation of Indian cuisines in international hotel menus, (b) the negotiation of authenticity and adaptation in shaping guest experiences, and (c) the dual role of Indian cuisine as both a commercial product and a tool of cultural diplomacy. However, limited thematic analyses specifically explore how these elements converge in the context of international hospitality, leaving a gap this study seeks to address.

Method
Research Design
This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the incorporation and impact of Indian regional cuisines in international hotel menus. A thematic analysis approach was used to uncover patterns, themes, and insights from multiple stakeholders, including hotel managers, chefs, and international guests. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring perceptions, experiences, and operational challenges in culinary offerings that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Collection
Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants, including eight hotel managers, six chefs, and six international tourists, across five international hotels known for serving Indian regional cuisines. Each interview lasted between thirty and fifty minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview protocol focused on menu planning, authenticity management, guest satisfaction, and operational challenges in serving Indian cuisines. In addition to interviews, document analysis was performed on hotel menus, promotional materials, and online reviews to supplement interview data and triangulate findings.

Sampling Technique
Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experience in managing, preparing, or consuming Indian cuisines in international hotel contexts. All participants had at least two years of professional experience or recent exposure to Indian cuisine offerings, ensuring the collection of rich and meaningful insights (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis
Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Initially, the data were familiarized through repeated readings of transcripts and documents to identify preliminary patterns. Significant statements and phrases were then coded manually, after which related codes were clustered into preliminary themes. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. Subsequently, each theme was defined clearly to capture its essence, and finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to the research objectives and existing literature.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants were provided with informed consent forms explaining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and measures to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect identities, and all data were securely stored and utilized solely for research purposes.

Trustworthiness
To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation by combining interview data with document analysis. Member checking was conducted to allow participants to verify the accuracy of transcriptions and interpretations. An audit trail was also maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings and discussion
The qualitative data collected from hotel managers, chefs, and international guests revealed several significant patterns regarding the incorporation and impact of Indian regional cuisines on international hotel menus. Analysis of interviews and documents resulted in the identification of four major themes: guest experience and satisfaction, authenticity and adaptation, operational challenges, and cultural and strategic significance. Each theme encompasses specific sub-themes that capture the nuances of the findings.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Percentage of Participants Mentioning
Guest Experience and Satisfaction	Sensory Appeal (taste, aroma, presentation)	70%
	Cultural Immersion (experiencing authentic regional dishes)	85%
	Service Quality (attentive and knowledgeable staff)	70%
Authenticity and Adaptation	Ingredient Sourcing (availability of traditional spices)	65%
	Recipe Adaptation (modifying spice levels, portion sizes, presentation)	60%
	Perceived Authenticity (guest perception of authenticity)	60%
Operational Challenges	Staff Training (culinary and cultural knowledge)	75%
	Resource Management (ingredient consistency and flavor maintenance)	70%
	Menu Planning (balancing authenticity, variety, and efficiency)	55%
Cultural and Strategic Significance	Culinary Diplomacy (promoting Indian culinary heritage)	80%
	Brand Differentiation (enhancing hotel image through unique regional dishes)	65%
	Market Positioning (themed menus and events for competitive advantage)	65%

Source: Author's field works

Guest Experience and Satisfaction

Guest experience and satisfaction emerged as a primary focus, with approximately 85% of international tourists reporting that Indian regional dishes enhanced their overall hotel experience. The sensory appeal of dishes, including taste, aroma, and presentation, was highlighted by 70% of participants as a key driver of satisfaction. Several guests also emphasized cultural immersion, noting that tasting authentic regional dishes such as biryani, dosa, and regional thalis provided a unique sense of engagement with Indian culture. Additionally, service quality was identified by 70% of participants as an influential factor, where attentive and knowledgeable staff enhanced the overall dining experience and reinforced perceptions of authenticity.

Authenticity and Adaptation

The balance between authenticity and adaptation emerged as a central concern. Approximately 65% of chefs and managers indicated challenges in sourcing traditional spices and ingredients, which often necessitated minor modifications. These included adjusting spice levels, portion sizes, and presentation to suit international palates, reflecting the sub-theme of recipe adaptation. Despite these modifications, around 60% of guests reported that the dishes still felt authentic, highlighting the importance of perceived authenticity, which was shaped not only by flavor but also by presentation, staff knowledge, and cultural context. Ingredient sourcing was thus a recurring challenge that influenced both operational decisions and guest satisfaction.

Operational Challenges

Operational and logistical aspects significantly impacted the delivery of Indian regional cuisines. Staff training was emphasized by 75% of participants as essential, ensuring chefs and service personnel understood traditional cooking methods and cultural nuances. Resource management was noted by 70% of respondents

as a challenge, particularly in maintaining consistent ingredient quality and flavor. Furthermore, 55% of participants highlighted the importance of menu planning, which required balancing authenticity, variety, and kitchen efficiency to meet guest expectations while maintaining operational feasibility.

Cultural and Strategic Significance

The strategic and cultural importance of Indian regional cuisines was widely recognized. Approximately 80% of managers and chefs viewed regional dishes as a medium for promoting India's culinary heritage, representing culinary diplomacy in practice. Offering unique regional dishes also served brand differentiation, as noted by 65% of participants, enhancing the hotel's image and providing a competitive advantage. Market positioning was strengthened through themed menus, cultural events, and festival specials, helping hotels present themselves as culturally aware and globally sophisticated, which also appealed to international tourists.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Indian regional cuisines on international hotel menus. Four major themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: guest experience and satisfaction, authenticity and adaptation, operational challenges, and cultural and strategic significance. These insights both corroborate and extend prior research on ethnic cuisines in international hospitality contexts.

Guest Experience and Satisfaction

Guest experience and satisfaction were identified as key drivers for integrating Indian regional cuisines. Approximately 85% of participants reported that regional dishes enhanced their overall hotel experience. The sensory appeal of dishes, including taste, aroma, and presentation, was highlighted by 70% of participants as critical to satisfaction. Tourists also emphasized cultural immersion, noting that experiencing authentic regional dishes such as biryani, dosa, and thalis provided meaningful engagement with Indian culture. Service quality, including attentive and knowledgeable staff, further enhanced satisfaction, reported by 70% of participants. These results align with Chhabra et al. (2013), who argued that ethnic cuisines enrich the cultural and sensory dimensions of tourism experiences. Kumar and Bakshi (2023) similarly noted that culturally informed service amplifies perceptions of authenticity and overall guest satisfaction.

Authenticity and Adaptation

Balancing authenticity with adaptation emerged as a critical challenge for hotel operators. About 65% of chefs and managers reported difficulties in sourcing traditional ingredients, leading to minor adjustments such as modifying spice levels, portion sizes, or presentation to suit international palates. Despite these changes, 60% of guests still perceived the dishes as authentic, highlighting the importance of perceived authenticity, reinforced by staff explanations and cultural context. This observation supports Le (2020), who emphasized that maintaining core cultural elements while adapting to target audiences is essential for successful ethnic cuisine delivery.

Operational Challenges

Operational factors significantly influenced the delivery of Indian regional cuisines. Staff training was highlighted by 75% of participants as essential for ensuring chefs and service personnel could prepare and present dishes appropriately. Resource management, including maintaining consistent ingredient quality and flavor, was noted by 70% of respondents. Strategic menu planning**,** emphasized by 55% of participants, required balancing authenticity, variety, and kitchen efficiency to meet guest expectations. These findings align with Kivela and Crotts (2006), who underscored the importance of culturally competent staff in delivering effective ethnic culinary experiences.

Cultural and Strategic Significance

Indian regional cuisines were widely recognized for their cultural and strategic value. Approximately 80% of managers viewed regional dishes as tools for promoting India's culinary heritage, representing culinary diplomacy. Offering unique regional dishes also contributed to brand differentiation, as noted by 65% of participants, enhancing the hotel's image and competitive advantage. Market positioning was strengthened through themed menus, cultural events, and festival specials, positioning hotels as culturally aware and globally sophisticated. These results resonate with Mandl (2021), who demonstrated that ethnic cuisine can serve as a medium for cultural influence and international branding.

Implications

The findings have several practical implications for international hotels. First, hotels should invest in staff training to ensure culturally informed preparation and presentation of regional cuisines. Second, menu design should strategically balance authenticity and adaptation to accommodate diverse guest preferences. Third, integrating regional dishes can serve as a marketing and branding tool, enhancing cultural appeal, guest satisfaction, and competitive positioning. Collectively, these strategies strengthen operational efficiency while promoting India's culinary heritage internationally.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Indian regional cuisines on international hotel menus through a thematic analysis of chefs, managers, and tourists. Four major themes emerged: guest experience and satisfaction, authenticity and adaptation, operational challenges, and cultural and strategic significance. The findings indicate that Indian regional dishes significantly enhance guest satisfaction by providing a rich sensory experience and an opportunity for cultural immersion. Dishes such as biryani, dosa, and thalis not only appeal to taste and presentation but also allow international tourists to engage with India's diverse culinary heritage, creating memorable and authentic dining experiences.

The study also highlights the balance hotels must strike between authenticity and adaptation. While sourcing traditional ingredients and preserving original recipes can be challenging, minor adaptations—such as adjusting spice levels or presentation styles—ensure that regional dishes remain accessible to international palates without compromising perceived authenticity. Operational challenges, including staff training, resource management, and menu planning, further underscore the complexity of integrating ethnic cuisines into international hotel settings.

Beyond guest experience, Indian regional cuisines play a strategic role in cultural representation and brand differentiation. Hotels that successfully incorporate regional dishes are able to project India's culinary identity internationally, serving both as cultural ambassadors and as establishments that enhance their competitive advantage. These findings align with prior research on culinary tourism, ethnic food authenticity, and gastronomic branding, reinforcing the significance of culturally informed culinary offerings in global hospitality.

In summary, the study demonstrates that Indian regional cuisines are not only a source of gastronomic delight but also a strategic asset for international hotels. By offering authentic, well-curated regional dishes, hotels can simultaneously elevate guest satisfaction, promote cultural heritage, and strengthen their market positioning in the competitive global hospitality industry.

Recommendations

1. Invest in Comprehensive Staff Training
   Hotels should prioritize training for chefs and service staff to ensure authentic preparation, presentation, and explanation of regional Indian dishes. Knowledgeable staff enhance guests' understanding and appreciation of the cuisine, contributing to a richer cultural and culinary experience.
2. Maintain Balance Between Authenticity and Adaptation

While preserving the core flavors and traditional recipes of regional cuisines, minor adjustments—such as moderating spice levels or adjusting portion sizes—can make dishes more accessible to international guests. Careful adaptation ensures wider acceptance without compromising cultural integrity.

3. Strategic Menu Planning and Rotation
    Hotels should design menus that highlight regional diversity and rotate special dishes seasonally or during cultural festivals. This approach maintains novelty, attracts repeat customers, and showcases the breadth of India's culinary heritage.

4. Ensure Quality Ingredient Sourcing and Consistency
    Collaborating with reliable suppliers is essential for maintaining the quality and authenticity of ingredients. Consistency in taste, presentation, and freshness reinforces guest satisfaction and builds trust in the hotel's culinary offerings.

5. Leverage Regional Cuisine for Marketing and Branding
    Integrating regional dishes into promotional campaigns, social media, and culinary events can enhance the hotel's brand image, emphasizing cultural awareness and differentiation in a competitive international market.

6. Collect and Integrate Guest Feedback
    Regularly gathering feedback through surveys, reviews, and direct interactions allows hotels to refine their menu offerings and service delivery. Feedback-driven adjustments ensure that Indian regional cuisines continue to meet international standards and evolving guest preferences.

7. Promote Cultural Education Alongside Dining
    Hotels can provide contextual information about dishes, including origin, preparation methods, and cultural significance. This enriches the dining experience, promotes cultural understanding, and strengthens the perceived authenticity of the cuisine.

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