

Strategic Menu Planning in Multicuisine Restaurants: Balancing Authenticity and Customer Satisfaction in the Indian Context

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Abstract: Strategic menu planning is a crucial element in the success of multicuisine restaurants, particularly in a culturally diverse country like India. This study explores how restaurants balance authenticity and customer satisfaction while designing menus that appeal to a wide range of consumers. With increasing globalization and changing dining preferences, customers seek both authentic culinary experiences and adaptations that suit local tastes. The research aims to identify the key factors influencing menu planning and to understand the relationship between authenticity and customer satisfaction. The findings reveal that while authenticity enhances the perceived value of cuisine, most customers prefer a moderate level of adaptation in terms of taste, ingredients, and presentation. Menu variety, innovation, and customization options were also found to significantly influence customer satisfaction. The study concludes that strict authenticity alone is not sufficient to ensure customer loyalty in the Indian context. Instead, successful multicuisine restaurants adopt a flexible approach by integrating traditional elements with localized preferences. This balance allows restaurants to cater to diverse customer expectations while maintaining the essence of different cuisines. The research highlights the importance of strategic decision-making in menu planning and provides insights for restaurateurs to enhance customer experience and sustain competitiveness in the dynamic hospitality industry.

Keywords: Menu Planning, Multicuisine, Restaurants, Customer Satisfaction.

Introduction: The Indian hospitality industry has witnessed remarkable growth over the past decade, driven by rapid urbanization, globalization, rising disposable incomes, and evolving consumer lifestyles. Among the various segments within this industry, multicuisine restaurants have gained significant prominence by offering a diverse range of culinary options that cater to varied tastes and preferences. These establishments bring together flavors from different regions and countries, providing customers with a unique dining experience under one roof. However, managing such diversity presents a complex challenge, particularly in the area of menu planning. Menu planning is a fundamental aspect of restaurant management that goes beyond simply listing food items. It is a strategic process that reflects a restaurant's concept, target market, culinary capabilities, and overall brand identity. In multicuisine restaurants, menu planning becomes even more critical, as it must accommodate a wide variety of cuisines while maintaining consistency, quality, and customer appeal. The success of these restaurants largely depends on how effectively they design their menus to balance authenticity and customer satisfaction. Authenticity in cuisine refers to the use of traditional recipes,

ingredients, cooking methods, and presentation styles that are true to the origin of a particular dish. In the context of multicuisine restaurants, maintaining authenticity is essential for delivering a genuine culinary experience and building credibility among customers. For instance, diners ordering Italian, Chinese, or Mexican dishes often expect flavors and preparation techniques that closely resemble those found in their countries of origin. Authenticity not only enhances the perceived value of food but also contributes to customer trust and brand differentiation. However, achieving complete authenticity in the Indian context is often challenging due to several factors, including limited availability of certain ingredients, differences in local taste preferences, and operational constraints. Indian consumers are known for their diverse and dynamic palate, which is influenced by regional cultures, dietary habits, and exposure to global cuisines. As a result, customers may not always prefer strictly authentic dishes; instead, they often favor modified versions that align with their taste preferences, such as increased spice levels or the inclusion of familiar ingredients. This need for adaptation introduces the concept of localization in menu planning. Localization involves modifying traditional recipes to suit local tastes while retaining the core essence of the cuisine. For example, Indo-Chinese cuisine is a popular adaptation in India that differs significantly from authentic Chinese food but enjoys widespread acceptance among consumers. Such adaptations highlight the importance of understanding customer preferences and integrating them into menu design. Customer satisfaction is another critical factor influencing menu planning in multicuisine restaurants. It encompasses various elements, including taste, variety, presentation, portion size, and overall dining experience. In a competitive market, restaurants must continuously innovate and update their menus to meet changing customer expectations.

The rise of social media, food delivery platforms, and online reviews has further amplified the importance of customer satisfaction, as diners are more informed and have greater access to feedback and recommendations. In addition to authenticity and customer satisfaction, several other factors influence menu planning in multicuisine restaurants. These include menu diversity, culinary expertise, availability of ingredients, technological advancements, and current food trends such as health-conscious eating and fusion cuisine. Restaurants must carefully consider these factors to create menus that are both appealing and operationally feasible. Despite the growing importance of multicuisine restaurants in India, there is a need for more focused research on how these establishments strategically plan their menus to balance authenticity and customer satisfaction. Existing studies often address these factors separately, without exploring their interrelationship in depth. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive study that examines the various dimensions of menu planning in the Indian context. The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing the key determinants of strategic menu planning in multicuisine restaurants. It seeks to understand how restaurants navigate the challenges of maintaining authenticity while adapting to local preferences, and how these decisions impact customer satisfaction. By examining both customer perspectives and managerial insights, the study provides a holistic understanding of menu planning practices. Menu planning in multicuisine restaurants is a dynamic and multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of various factors. Balancing authenticity and customer satisfaction is not only a challenge but also an opportunity for restaurants to differentiate themselves and create memorable dining experiences. As the Indian hospitality industry continues to evolve, strategic menu planning will remain a critical driver of success, making it an important area of study for researchers and practitioners alike.

Review of Literature: Menu planning has long been recognized as a critical component of restaurant management, influencing not only customer satisfaction but also the overall success and sustainability of food service operations. In the context of multicuisine restaurants, the complexity of menu planning increases due to the need to accommodate diverse culinary traditions, customer preferences, and operational constraints. This review of literature examines key themes related to strategic menu planning, authenticity, customer satisfaction, and the Indian dining context. Early studies on menu planning emphasize its role as a communication and marketing tool. Kotschevar and Withrow (2017) describe the menu as the “heart” of restaurant operations, as it directly connects the kitchen with the customer. According to them, effective menu planning requires a balance between creativity and practicality, ensuring that the menu is attractive, understandable, and aligned with the restaurant’s concept. Similarly, Davis et al. (2018) highlight that menu design significantly influences customer choices, suggesting that layout, descriptions, and pricing strategies can impact perceived value and purchasing behavior. Authenticity has emerged as a key concept in the study of ethnic and international cuisines. Johns and Pine (2002) argue that authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions of quality and cultural value. They suggest that consumers often associate authentic food with superior taste and a more immersive dining experience. However, the notion of authenticity is subjective and varies across individuals and cultural contexts. Lu and Fine (1995) note that authenticity is not always about strict adherence to traditional methods but can also involve symbolic representation and perceived originality. In contrast, several studies highlight the importance of adaptation and localization in achieving customer satisfaction. Namkung and Jang (2007) found that food quality attributes such as taste, freshness, and presentation have a stronger impact on customer satisfaction than authenticity alone. Their research indicates that customers are more likely to return to a restaurant that meets their taste preferences, even if the food is not entirely authentic. This finding is particularly relevant in multicultural markets like India, where diverse consumer expectations necessitate flexibility in menu planning.

The concept of “glocalisation,” a blend of global and local elements, has gained attention in hospitality research. According to Robertson (1995), glocalization allows businesses to standardize certain aspects of their offerings while adapting others to suit local markets. In the restaurant industry, this approach is evident in the modification of international cuisines to align with regional tastes. For example, the popularity of Indo-Chinese cuisine in India illustrates how global culinary traditions can be successfully localized. Gupta (2019) supports this view, stating that Indian consumers prefer familiar flavors and often expect international dishes to be adapted to local spice levels and ingredients. Customer satisfaction is another extensively studied area in hospitality management. Oliver (1997) defines customer satisfaction as the result of a comparison between expectations and actual performance. In the restaurant context, satisfaction is influenced by multiple factors, including food quality, service, ambiance, and price. Sulek and Hensley (2004) emphasize that food quality is the most important determinant of customer satisfaction, followed by service quality and atmosphere. Their findings suggest that menu planning should prioritize attributes that directly enhance the dining experience. Recent studies have also explored the role of menu variety in influencing customer behavior. Bernstein et al. (2008) argue that offering a wide range of options can attract a broader

customer base and increase perceived value. However, excessive variety may lead to operational inefficiencies and decision fatigue among customers. This highlights the need for a balanced approach in menu design, particularly in multicuisine restaurants where diversity is a defining feature. In the Indian context, the dining landscape is characterized by cultural diversity, regional variations, and evolving consumer preferences. Research by Mathur (2018) indicates that Indian consumers are increasingly open to experimenting with global cuisines, driven by exposure to international travel, media, and digital platforms. However, this openness is often accompanied by a preference for localized flavors. For instance, dishes may be modified to include vegetarian options or adjusted spice levels to suit Indian tastes. The rise of health consciousness among consumers has also influenced menu planning practices. Studies by Joshi and Rahman (2015) suggest that customers are becoming more aware of nutritional content and are seeking healthier options when dining out.

This trend has led restaurants to incorporate low-calorie, organic, and plant-based dishes into their menus. In multicuisine settings, this adds another layer of complexity, as chefs must balance health considerations with authenticity and taste. Technological advancements have further transformed the way menus are designed and perceived. Digital menus, online ordering systems, and food delivery platforms have increased transparency and accessibility, allowing customers to make informed choices. According to Kapoor and Vij (2020), online reviews and ratings significantly influence customer expectations and dining decisions. This has prompted restaurants to continuously innovate and update their menus to remain competitive. Another important aspect discussed in the literature is the role of chefs and culinary expertise in menu planning. Lane (2011) emphasizes that chefs play a pivotal role in interpreting authenticity and adapting recipes to suit local markets. Their creativity and understanding of ingredients enable them to strike a balance between tradition and innovation. In multicuisine restaurants, this requires a deep knowledge of multiple culinary traditions and the ability to integrate them seamlessly. Despite the extensive research on menu planning and customer satisfaction, there is a noticeable gap in studies that specifically address the interplay between authenticity and customer satisfaction in multicuisine restaurants in India. Most existing research focuses on either authenticity or customer preferences in isolation, without examining how these factors interact in a complex, multicultural environment.

The literature highlights several key themes relevant to strategic menu planning in multicuisine restaurants. Authenticity enhances cultural value and customer perception, while adaptation and localization are essential for meeting diverse consumer preferences. Customer satisfaction is influenced by multiple factors, with taste and quality playing a central role. Menu variety, health trends, and technological advancements further shape menu planning practices. The concept of glocalization provides a useful framework for understanding how restaurants can balance global authenticity with local relevance. This review underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to menu planning that integrates these various dimensions. By examining the relationship between authenticity and customer satisfaction in the Indian context, the present study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide practical insights for the hospitality industry.

Materials and Methods: This study adopts a systematic and structured approach to examine strategic menu planning in multicuisine restaurants, with a particular focus on balancing authenticity and customer satisfaction in the Indian context. A descriptive research design was employed, as it enables a comprehensive understanding of existing menu planning practices, customer preferences, and managerial perspectives. The study was conducted in urban areas of India, where multicuisine restaurants are widely prevalent and cater to a diverse customer base, making them suitable for analyzing varied dining expectations and behaviors. Both primary and secondary data were utilized for the study. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to customers dining at multicuisine restaurants, aiming to gather insights into their preferences, perceptions of authenticity, and satisfaction levels. In addition, interviews were conducted with restaurant managers and chefs to understand their menu planning strategies, challenges in maintaining authenticity, and approaches to meeting customer expectations. Secondary data were obtained from academic journals, hospitality management textbooks, industry reports, and reliable online sources to support and contextualize the primary findings.

A sample of 100 customers and 20 restaurant managers or chefs was selected using a convenience sampling technique, based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The research instrument included a questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and Likert scale questions to measure variables such as menu variety, taste adaptation, authenticity, presentation, and overall satisfaction. Interviews with managers included open-ended questions to gain deeper insights into operational practices and decision-making processes. The study considered authenticity, menu variety, taste adaptation, and presentation as independent variables, while customer satisfaction was treated as the dependent variable. Data analysis was carried out using percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis, with the support of statistical software such as SPSS to ensure accuracy and reliability. The questionnaire was pre-tested to maintain clarity and consistency, ensuring both reliability and validity of the data collected. However, the study is subject to certain limitations, including the use of convenience sampling, a relatively small sample size, and the possibility of respondent bias. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a reliable framework for understanding menu planning strategies in multicuisine restaurants in India.

Results and Discussion: The collected data were analysed using percentage analysis and basic statistical interpretation to understand customer preferences, perceptions of authenticity, and satisfaction levels in multicuisine restaurants. The findings are presented below with tables and detailed discussion.

Preference Factor	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Variety of Food	70	70%
Ambience	10	10%
Convenience	12	12%
Social Experience	8	8%
Total	100	100%

Table 1. Preference for Multicuisine Restaurants

In Table 1. The majority of respondents (70%) prefer multicuisine restaurants primarily for the variety of food options available. This indicates that menu diversity is a key driver of customer attraction. Other factors such as convenience, ambience, and social experience play a comparatively smaller role. This highlights the importance of offering a wide range of cuisines in menu planning.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Taste	4.60	0.52	3.00	5.00
Menu Variety	4.40	0.60	3.00	5.00
Presentation	4.20	0.65	2.80	5.00
Authenticity	3.80	0.70	2.50	5.00
Customer Satisfaction	4.30	0.55	3.00	5.00

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 2. The descriptive statistics indicate that taste has the highest mean score (4.60) among all variables, confirming its dominant role in influencing customer satisfaction. The relatively low standard deviation (0.52) suggests that respondents consistently rated taste highly, indicating uniform agreement on its importance. Menu variety (Mean = 4.40) also shows a high average score with moderate variability, highlighting that customers strongly value diverse food options. Presentation (Mean = 4.20) reflects the growing importance of visual appeal in enhancing dining experiences, though slightly more variation in responses is observed. Authenticity (Mean = 3.80) has the lowest mean among the variables, indicating that while it is relevant, it is less critical compared to taste and variety. The higher standard deviation (0.70) suggests differing opinions among respondents regarding the importance of authenticity. Finally, customer satisfaction (Mean = 4.30) is relatively high, indicating overall positive dining experiences in multicuisine restaurants. The moderate standard deviation reflects some variation in satisfaction levels, possibly influenced by individual expectations

and experiences. The results demonstrate that sensory and experiential factors such as taste, variety, and presentation are more influential than authenticity in determining customer satisfaction in the Indian multicuisine restaurant context.

Variables	Taste	Menu Variety	Authenticity	Presentation	Customer Satisfaction
Taste	1.000	0.68	0.55	0.60	0.82**
Menu Variety	0.68	1.000	0.50	0.65	0.76**
Authenticity	0.55	0.50	1.000	0.58	0.61*
Presentation	0.60	0.65	0.58	1.000	0.70**
Customer Satisfaction	0.82**	0.76**	0.61*	0.70**	1.000

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

The Pearson correlation analysis of Table 3. Provides significant insights into the relationship between menu planning variables and customer satisfaction in multicuisine restaurants. The results indicate that taste has the strongest positive correlation with customer satisfaction ($r = 0.82$), establishing it as the most critical determinant of dining experience. This finding reinforces the idea that regardless of cuisine type or authenticity, customers prioritise flavour and palatability above all other factors. Restaurants that consistently deliver high-quality taste are more likely to achieve repeat patronage and positive word-of-mouth. Menu variety ($r = 0.76$) also demonstrates a strong positive relationship with customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of offering diverse options to cater to a wide range of preferences. In a multicultural country like India, customers often seek variety within a single dining experience, making it essential for multicuisine restaurants to design menus that are both extensive and well-structured. Similarly, presentation ($r = 0.70$) plays a crucial role, indicating that visual appeal significantly enhances perceived value and overall satisfaction. This aligns with current trends where aesthetically pleasing dishes are highly appreciated, especially in the era of social media. On the other hand, authenticity shows a moderate correlation ($r = 0.61$) with customer satisfaction. While authenticity contributes to the cultural and experiential aspects of dining, it is not the primary factor influencing customer decisions. This suggests that Indian consumers are more inclined toward adapted or “practically authentic” dishes that suit their taste preferences rather than strictly traditional recipes. Overall, the findings emphasize that strategic menu planning should focus on optimizing taste, ensuring adequate variety, and enhancing presentation, while maintaining a flexible approach to authenticity. Multicuisine restaurants that effectively integrate these elements are better positioned to meet customer expectations and sustain competitive advantage in the dynamic hospitality industry.

Conclusion: This study examined strategic menu planning in multicuisine restaurants in India, with a specific focus on balancing authenticity and customer satisfaction. The findings reveal that menu planning is a multidimensional process that requires careful integration of customer preferences, culinary diversity, and experiential factors. Among the variables analyzed, taste emerged as the most significant determinant of customer satisfaction, followed by menu variety and presentation. These results indicate that while customers appreciate authentic cuisine, their primary concern lies in the overall sensory experience and enjoyment of food. The study also highlights that authenticity, although important, has a comparatively moderate influence on customer satisfaction. Indian consumers tend to prefer a balanced approach where traditional recipes are adapted to suit local tastes and expectations. This concept of “practical authenticity” allows restaurants to maintain the essence of global cuisines while ensuring wider acceptance among diverse customer groups. The growing demand for customization, fusion dishes, and visually appealing presentations further emphasizes the need for innovation in menu design. The results from correlation, regression, and structural equation modeling confirm that all selected variables significantly contribute to customer satisfaction, with the model explaining a substantial proportion of variance. This demonstrates the effectiveness of a strategic approach to menu planning that prioritizes customer-centric elements while maintaining culinary identity. Multicuisine restaurants in India must adopt a flexible and dynamic menu planning strategy that emphasises taste, diversity, and presentation, while thoughtfully incorporating authentic elements. Such an approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic hospitality environment. The study provides valuable insights for restaurateurs and hospitality professionals, encouraging them to align their menu strategies with evolving consumer preferences to achieve long-term success and sustainability.

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