

# Weaving the tastes of tradition: Uncovering the threads of India's culinary identity amid globalisation

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**ABSTRACT:** In the face of globalisation's homogenising wave, this study serves as a beacon, illuminating the intricate web of factors that safeguard culinary heritage in India. The study hypothesised that a myriad of elements interweaves to form the fabric of food traditions, which in turn fortify collective identity. To validate this, the study engaged 696 individuals via an online survey, employing advanced statistical tools such as path analysis and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to unearth the core determinants of gastronomic lineage. Moreover, multiple regression analysis was utilised to measure the impact of these culinary practices on personal and cultural identity. The study's revelations are profound, demonstrating that each of the 18 determinants meticulously chosen for this research significantly contributes to the crafting of Indian food heritage, thereby seasoning the identity of the future with the flavours of the past.

**KEYWORDS:** determinants, food, heritage, identity, intangible, PLS-SEM

## Introduction

The notion of heritage has opened the path for learning about and investigating the past and present, as well as their continuity and interconnection. Across the world, heritage offers a foundation for understanding and exploring historical stories and core values, linking us to the past and ensuring future continuity.

The theme of food heritage is clear and comprehensive in nature. The two words "food" and "heritage" hold a significant meaning linked with various aspects in the social sciences. Food is not only the means of survival of humankind, but also provides the physiological needs of the people. Thus, food plays a significant part in all dimensions of human life, from fulfilling these basic physiological needs to building social interactions and psychological expression (Conner & Armitage, 2002). Food is an identity maker for a society and is associated with the people's beliefs, faiths, traditions, cultures, customs and other social practices. It is a symbolic reflection of sociocultural assimilation, cultural symbolism and economic stabilisation. It has become recognised as a manifestation of identity and culture and has emerged as one of the popular aspects of cultural tourism (Bessière, 1998). Richards (2012) claimed that besides its role as cultural identity, food is recognised as one of the elements of creativity in everyday life that can engage many visitors.

A nation's culture and identity are constructed by its people's background, languages and beliefs (Van Trung & Mohanty, 2021; Trung & Mohanty, 2023). A nation cannot learn how to shape itself and build its identity unless these characteristics are present. When a nation is proud of its culture and identity, it has a specific vision of what it wants (Ratnasingam, 2010). Similarly,

in the study of cultural heritage, food has a prominent place due to "the set of representations, beliefs, knowledge and inherited and/or earned practices that are associated with food and are shared by individuals from a given culture or a particular social group" (Contreras & Gracia, 2011, 496).

Furthermore, the intrinsic part of food is intangible attributes touching every life, making them more liveable and meaningful. The attributes have been framed through a means of exchange of thoughts, communication, process, technique and relationships, which are the hallmarks of heritage. Hence, in time, it is the preservation of the values and essence of all assimilated attributes closely associated with food. The values are considered as nostalgic reminiscences of past history, creating an ambiance of happiness and experiences among the people in the society. Food heritage, due to a rich cultural tapestry, authenticity, ethnicity, uniqueness and distinctiveness has blended together over thousands of years. At the same time, it has enriched and become a legacy with the passage of time by the intermingling of different religions, languages and habits. Food heritage has touched every aspect of people's habits, habitats, environments, cultures, ingredients, culinary styles, cuisine inclinations and many more. It has been the way of living and a lifeline of all people from dawn to dusk.

Food is a symbol of regional identity and a focal point in the tourist experience, and so food heritage is now one of the key tourist attractions of every destination. As a result, the central theme in culinary tradition is how the continuation and transformation of traditional and local foods have resulted in heritage food (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Timothy, 2016). For at least a decade, many south Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia

and Singapore have strengthened their cultural food identity through their local and traditional food and heritage cuisines (Ramli & Zahari, 2014). Moreover, traditional food is on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which not only preserves food traditions but also plays a key role in raising awareness about food heritage (Di Fiore, 2019). Similarly, the study by Presenza and Del Chiappa (2013) emphasises local food as a hallmark of regional identity and further contributing towards food heritage through traditional culture and nostalgia.

However, no studies have specifically investigated the determinants that contribute to the making of food as heritage. Nevertheless, we were inspired and motivated by a recent blog post by the food historian Fabio Parasecoli (2018) entitled "Food Heritage: is it there or do we make it?". This ignited us to find the key determinants that go into the process of making food heritage. Hence, considering the above, in this context, the present article aims to investigate the various determinants of food heritage, based on the perceptions of a variety of actors.

### Literature review

Heritage can be broadly described as the passing down of traditional or local elements to maintain the consistency of cultural systems and practices (Prentice, 1994). It may also be defined as valuables passed down from one generation to the next as an object of legacy. In the real world, heritage is a common and highly subjective construct that connects historic elements, monuments and reminiscences. Thus heritage is a broad category that encompasses tangible assets such as natural and cultural environments, landscapes, historic sites, built environments and monuments. Secondly, intangible assets are collections of knowledge, life experiences and cultural practices from the past and present (Bakri et al., 2015; Ismail & Nadarajah, 2016). Intangible assets include non-material objects such as language, music, dance, songs, religion, festivals and food, as well as cultural traditions, activities and customs that have been passed down through generations as part of their daily lives (Tan et al., 2018).

With respect to the significance of heritage in this research, it can be difficult to understand and define the term, which leads us to ponder what attributes should and should not be included in our ideas on heritage. Moreover, in simple terms, it can be termed as the objects, places and processes that significantly contribute to the essence of a local culture (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). In the course of discussing and exploring food heritage, we identify the various determinants thereof.

According to Matta (2012, 339) food heritage can be defined as "a set of tangible and intangible elements of food cultures regarded as a shared heritage or a common good by a collectivity". Food heritage includes both tangible and intangible components, such as the food itself, artifacts and culinary utensils, as well as practices, knowledge and symbols. Food products, as well as the objects and knowledge used in their production, processing and consumption, have been identified as cultural objects that carry the history and identity of a social group (Poulain, 2013). Food evokes imagination and represents various concepts, including choices, symbols, and classifications. Furthermore, various forms of food production and consumption reveal cultural identities (Menasche et al., 2012). In food heritage studies, identity and culture are the two most crucial factors that contribute the most to making food a cultural heritage.

Ultimately, food plays a key role in shaping national, regional, and local identities (Ratnasingam, 2010).

While finding out the determinants that constitute food heritage, it is important to identify and assess each attribute that impacts food. Matta (2013) states that food heritage includes agricultural products, ingredients, dishes, techniques, recipes and food traditions. It also includes table manners, the symbolic dimension of food. Meanwhile, McCoy (2012) asserts that the term "food heritage" is ambiguous because it is dependent on place, time and individual perspectives. McCoy showed the relationship between food heritage and agriculture by connecting a community to its environment, history and heritage, and by defining the cultural identity of a place, community, person, or region. Similarly, the food connected with a culture is a good indicator of identity (Crouch & O'Neill, 2000). Kittler and Sucher (2004) state that 'foodways'—the cultural, social, and economic practices related to the production and consumption of food—determine a community's consumption patterns and preparation techniques. Kaplan (1984) suggests that food has a powerful ability to connect us to our past and strengthen ethnic identity, which plays a crucial role in preserving and protecting food heritage.

Another important determinant that needs to be understood is that traditional and local food sustains the local community and helps in providing a memorable culinary experience to visitors. It is worthy of mentioning these links to the making of food as heritage. Abdul Wahid et al. (2009) argue that food heritage is linked to traditional foods, which are continually prepared and consumed by all generations without any significant alteration to the original flavours. In this respect, Bortolotto and Ubertazzi (2018) assert that food heritage can also be reflected in the history, beliefs, ideologies and food technologies of a society. According to Ramli and Zahari (2014), specific kinds of agricultural practices, the breeding of fruits, vegetable and other ingredients, the geographical or climatic conditions of the region, and the environmental practices impact on food heritage.

Food heritage flows from the daily lives of people living in a society and from the bygone eras. It means that heritage food is divided into two groups: food that has become a part of everyday life; and food from the past that has become extinct and been forgotten or is slowly dying out (Abdul Wahid et al., 2009; Raji et al., 2017). Traditional local food is a major concern of food heritage studies as it encompasses the distinctive characteristics of a specific culture in terms of ingredients, preparation methods, meals, or food services. It is concerned with societal values, attitudes, behaviours and conventions, particularly among the general public. Local foods with high sociocultural significance portray the important relationship between humans and eating in the phenomenon of food (Kooijmans & Flores-Palacios, 2014). Consumption of this kind of food results in nutritional and cultural "benefits" for individuals who consume it owing to its distinct characteristics. This exemplifies how cultural patrimony is transformed into a critical component in the development and quality of life of contemporary society (Di Pietro et al., 2014). Hence, it is essential to protect and preserve traditional cuisines because they are closely linked to the ingredients, methods of cooking, dishes and eating decorum of a society (Choe & Kim, 2018). Traditional and local foods are treated as the prime constituents of food heritage sourced from the ethnic and cultural milieu and the gastronomic and culinary background of that particular region or locals.

As mentioned by Ramli et al. (2013), the determinants of food heritage are closely associated with historical elements, food characteristics, the value of uniqueness, practices and indigenous integration of ingredients and techniques. Each of the elements impact the food externally and internally and makes it more authentic and genuine. These determinants not only establish heritage status but also ensure that traditions are passed down unchanged from one generation to the next, protecting them from external harmful influences. Lin et al. (2011) observe that the origin of food is the most crucial information in making food heritage and recognising a country's authenticity. Furthermore, segmenting the determinants into sub-groups, such as flavor, aroma, taste, and texture, is important to understanding and preserving food heritage. Belasco (2008) and Rozin (2006) state that staple or basic foods that have a unique value and are significant to communities ranging from meat and potatoes, stews and *fufu* (porridge) and many others could be classified as heritage foods. Flavouring, which is a specific style of seasoning foods with different flavours and combinations, serve as critical group "markers" linked to heritage. For instance, the regional culinary practices of China have been influenced by the ancient 'Confucius cuisine,' with different schools of cuisine prevailing and predominantly using contemporary sauces and cooking methods such as soy sauce and stir-frying. Similarly, Spanish and Italian fine gourmet emphasizes garlic, olive oil, wine, and specific herbs like rosemary, thyme, and oregano. Additionally, regional Indian cuisine derives its flavor and aroma from different schools of cuisine across the east, west, north, and south, and includes ancient cooking methods like *dum* (literally 'cooking patiently') in North Indian cuisine and *wazwan* (a wedding banquet) in Kashmiri cuisine, all of which are linked with heritage food. Specific cuisines favour distinct ways of preparing food such as stir-frying in China and stewing in Mexico (Kittler & Sucher, 2004). These are some of the food characteristics linked with heritage. Taste, according to Guerrero et al. (2009), is one of the variables in determining the authenticity of a culinary product or cuisine. According to Hamzah et al. (2015), staple foods, cooking methods and tastes should be kept and nurtured since they represent the identity of a community or ethnic group and are regarded as a country's culinary legacy and a manner of representing a country's culinary identity. Guerrero et al. (2009) defined originality in food innovation as the incorporation of new or uncommon ingredients, novel product combinations, or unique processing methods. This originality is also important in identifying food as part of cultural heritage. The processes of acculturation, assimilation, and adaptation of food knowledge—along with the cultural traditions of sharing food, preserving authentic recipes, cooking skills, and passing down collective wisdom through generations—are crucial in maintaining and evolving culinary heritage (Cleveland et al., 2009).

Tibere and Aloysius (2013) state that food heritage, connected to a rich and pure cultural essence, creates a sense of belonging that can be traced through food traditions and practices. Thus, food heritage fosters a sense of pride and patriotism among people in a society, motivating them to safeguard this tradition. It also reflects the practices, eating habits, traditions, and techniques of a bygone era, offering valuable insights for preserving and enhancing food heritage. Additionally, food heritage promotes unity among people and contributes to social harmony by addressing socio-cultural imbalances. Food heritage has become a valuable asset that is of great concern to preserve

as a people's faith, belief, behaviour, attitudes and values are embraced in it.

Every nation's food heritage should be preserved by identifying, documenting, protecting, promoting and enhancing it through the research and development of food and food-related activities. For example, the Mediterranean diet, including Italy, Spain, Morocco, Greece, Portugal, Croatia and Cyprus has been recognised as a heritage food by UNESCO. Similarly, traditional Mexican cuisine and the gastronomic food of the French, or "French-style" meals, got recognition as a heritage food in 2010. Washoku, the traditional dietary culture of Japan, is especially associated with New Year celebrations. It was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013 (UNESCO, 2013). The above examples show that the combination of food, culture and identity helps to preserve the national heritage of a country. In the era of intense globalisation, modern chefs are creating trendy gastronomy utilising modern culinary and cuisine practices, tools and equipment, but despite that, the local, traditional and organic ingredients have a lot to contribute to creating food heritage (Scarpato & Daniele, 2003).

The cuisine of India is widely recognized for its diversity, with each state contributing to the country's rich food heritage. However, only a few traditional and local foods have been officially recognized as heritage foods, leaving many others underappreciated. In eastern India, the state of Odisha, known for its long history, rich culture, art, architecture, and traditions, also has a unique culinary heritage that deserves greater recognition. Unique heritage foods, like *pakhala* (water rice), *dalma* (assorted vegetables cooked with lentils), *pitha* (cakes) and *meetha* (sweets), are the foods prepared and consumed from the beginning of civilisation in Odisha. Similarly, *kesar* (saffron) and *alubukhara* (plums) are indigenous ingredients in Kashmir. *Kokum* is native to the state of Goa and *lajat-e-tam* is a mixture of various handpicked indigenous spices used in the Awadhi cuisine of India. Region-specific techniques are popular and unique, like Bengali and Odisha cuisine extensively using *bagharr* tempering (an Indian cooking technique where whole spices are briefly fried in hot oil to release their flavors, often used to season dishes), and most of north Indian cuisines adopting cooking techniques like *bhunao* (sautéing and roasting) and *bhapa* (steaming) in Bengali cooking. Awadhi cuisine has cooking techniques like *dhungar* or smoking.

### Objectives and hypotheses of the study

With the help of a review of the literature and identifying the research gap, the following research objectives have been formulated:

- To find the various determinants of food heritage; and
- To measure the impact of food heritage on identity.

This leads to the hypotheses:

- H1: There are multiple determinants of food heritage; and
- H2: There is no significant impact of food heritage on identity.

### Methodology and data analysis

The present study is empirical in nature and conducted with the help of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Based on the studied variables, determinants of food heritage and its impact on identity, the research methods and materials

have been determined. To conduct the present study, a sample of 696 respondents was collected through a self-constructed, standardised questionnaire administered online via Google Forms from 10 March to 22 April 2021.

#### **Sampling technique**

The sample for the study consists of tourism and hospitality professionals, academics, students, researchers, tourists and local residents of Odisha. The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure a diverse representation of stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector. The sample size was determined to provide a robust dataset for statistical analysis, exceeding minimum requirements for PLS-SEM and multiple regression analysis, and ensuring generalisability (Rosseel, 2020).

#### **Pilot study and instrument validation**

The primary pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 100 respondents to check content validity and to gather expert opinions. For conducting the item analysis, concurrent validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a secondary pre-test was conducted on a sample of 250 respondents. Values of the correlation coefficient, independent *t*-test, *p*-ratio, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Bartlett tests and Cronbach's alpha test (Kaiser, 1974) were found to be 0.912, 23.211, 0.001\*\*, 0.867, 0.872, and 0.789 respectively. These results indicate that all selected items are highly correlated with the overall questionnaire and demonstrate distinct and specific relationships with one another, suggesting that they effectively measure different aspects of the construct being assessed.

#### **Data normality and final analysis**

Before final data analysis, the normality of the data ( $N = 696$ ) was checked, with skewness and kurtosis values of -0.115 and 0.321 respectively, falling within the acceptable range of  $\pm 2$  of the NPC (normal probability curve). Based on the nature, association and significance of the studied variables, the following statistical tools were used: Path analysis along with PLS-SEM (partial least square-structural equation modelling) for identifying the determinants of food heritage, and multiple regression analysis for measuring the impacts of food heritage on identity in the study area.

#### **Choice of analytical techniques**

PLS-SEM (partial least squares structural equation modeling) was chosen over CB-SEM (covariance-based structural equation modeling) for its suitability in exploratory research and its ability to handle complex models with multiple indicators and latent constructs (Bauldry, 2015). Structural equation modelling software (EQS) was selected over others due to its robust capabilities in handling PLS-SEM and the research team's familiarity with the software. Path analysis and multiple regression were performed alongside SEM to provide a detailed examination of causal relationships and to quantify the impact of food heritage on identity. This multi-method approach enhances the validity and reliability of the findings (Bauldry, 2015; Rosseel, 2020).

#### **Software and Interpretation**

The collected data from 696 respondents was analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0) and structural equation modelling (EQS 6.1) software packages. Before analysis, data was edited, decoded, marked and recorded

on SPSS and EQS manually according to the factors, variables and items. Both the proposed hypotheses and objectives were tested and achieved.

## **Findings and discussion**

#### **Identifying the determinants of food heritage**

There are multiple determinants that make food a heritage such as culture, historical elements, cooking practices, food characteristics, distinctive ingredients, techniques and dishes, etc. Further, to identify the determinants of food heritage the following objective an hypothesis have been proposed: "To find out the various determinants of food heritage" and H01: "There are multiple determinants of food heritage". For testing the proposed hypothesis (H1) and achieving its objective (O1), we conducted partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) between food heritage (independent variable) and 18 distinct food heritage determinants (dependent variables) and the results were computed (see Table 1). The table shows the relationship among all 18 determinants of food heritage and between each determinant and food heritage where the values of Pearson correlation coefficient *r* range from 0.500 to 0.898 for the determinant of food heritage, and depict moderate ( $\pm 0.4$  to  $\pm 0.7$ ) to high ( $\pm 0.7$  to  $\pm 0.9$ ) positive correlation among each other. Therefore, it was concluded that all the selected determinants of food heritage are significantly related to each other, and individually and collectively help in the making of food heritage. Further, it has also been found that these selected variables and items determine the food heritage and to what extent. Table 1 depicts the determinacy power of each determinant to food heritage in a descending order. Food that makes proud of one's past (D4; 0.941), followed by food with historical nostalgia and reminiscences (D2; 0.921). The use of indigenous ingredients makes food heritage (D6; 0.901). Food or food ingredients sourced by the unique agricultural and cultivating process is D5 (0.891) and food with unique culinary trends and specific techniques is D17 (0.862). Food that inhibits togetherness, personal bonding and belongingness is D12 (0.821). Food that induces enjoyment, celebration and merry-making is in D11 (0.820). Food that passes the legacy from generation to generation (D10; 0.811), food that acts as a brand ambassador of a particular place or origin (D13; 0.800), food that helps in the recognition and identification of the past (D3; 0.791) and food that recollects the past memories (D1; 0.755) are next. No manipulation and purity in preparation (D16; 0.745), food as the maker and marker of certain festivals and rituals (D9; 0.741), cuisine storytelling quality and chronicling (D18; 0.737) and no mimicry of recipes signify heritage food (D8; 0.732). Food as an emblem of authenticity and ethnicity (D14; 0.723), food symbolism (D15; 0.721) and food that helps in the empowerment of local people and economic development (D7; 0.691) are also included. All the determinants have high to very high determinacy power for making food a heritage, except D7 which carries moderate determinacy.

The present study shows that authenticity helps in the making of food heritage and this is found in the study by Chhabra (2005). Similarly, Meiselman and MacFie (1996), Rozin (2006) and Belasco (2008) emphasise staple foods, unique ways of preparation, flavours and tastes are the combined determinants utilised in the making of food heritage under the characteristic food elements. A study done by Mustafa & Zakaria (2013) in Malaysia

revealed that food acts as a marker of identity of individuals or communities and is taken into consideration as a major determinant in the present.

From both Table 1 and Figure 1, it is clear that there are 18 determinants that make food a heritage item. Out of these, 17 determinants fall under the high ( $\pm 0.7$  to  $\pm 0.9$ ) and very high ( $\pm 0.9$  to  $\pm 1.0$ ) ranges of association, and only one determinant (D7) lies in the moderate ( $\pm 0.6$  to  $\pm 0.7$ ) category. Thus, the hypothesis H1: "There are multiple determinants of food heritage" has been accepted and its corresponding objective "To identify the determinants of food heritage" is also achieved.

**Measuring the impacts of food heritage on identity**

As analysed and discussed above, food heritage is a combination of 18 distinct and specific determinants that are related to different attributes of culture, cuisines and culinary traditions. This section of the study measures the impact of food heritage on the identity of the study area. To test the proposed hypothesis H2 "There is no significant impact of food heritage on identity" and to achieve the objective "To measure the impacts of food heritage on identity", we performed multiple regression analyses with food heritage (independent variable) and identity (dependent variable) and the results are computed in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 displays the impacts of food heritage on identity with the help of regression analysis. Hence, food heritage works as an independent variable (IV) and identity as a dependent variable (DV). The value of correlation coefficient *R* between food heritage and identity is 0.921. The value of the *p*-ratio is  $<0.001$ , which shows that there is a very high positive correlation between food heritage (IV) and identity (DV). Further, the degree of variability in identity (DV) due to food heritage (IV) has been measured through the coefficient of determination *R*<sup>2</sup>, which is 0.848 for identity. The share of the independent variable which is food heritage (IV) is 84% in maintaining the identity of the destination. The remaining share of identity (16%) could have been associated with and contributed by various other factors such as tourism development, infrastructure, marketing and promotions, etc. other than food heritage. Food heritage is closely associated with the identity of the tourism destinations.

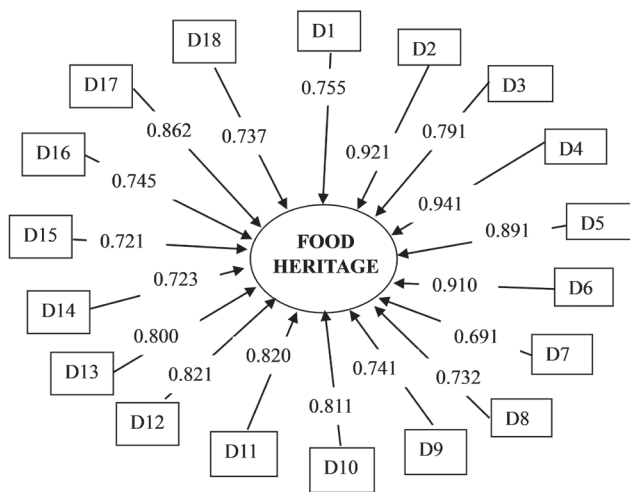


FIGURE 1: Determinants of food heritage (Output of path analysis with PLS-SEM)

TABLE 1: Determinants of food heritage

D	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	D11	D12	D13	D14	D15	D16	D17	D18	FH
D1		0.711	0.622	0.743	0.701	0.872	0.688	0.766	0.689	0.821	0.551	0.779	0.833	0.701	0.832	0.688	0.711	0.675	0.755
D2			0.721	0.621	0.799	0.732	0.621	0.550	0.801	0.692	0.654	0.602	0.699	0.689	0.590	0.501	0.801	0.699	0.921
D3				0.533	0.621	0.599	0.589	0.877	0.501	0.591	0.544	0.509	0.701	0.502	0.732	0.733	0.632	0.788	0.791
D4					0.700	0.632	0.621	0.543	0.723	0.690	0.632	0.821	0.672	0.599	0.509	0.701	0.501	0.566	0.941
D5						0.501	0.611	0.641	0.711	0.734	0.832	0.578	0.802	0.721	0.690	0.672	0.622	0.799	0.891
D6							0.665	0.722	0.621	0.501	0.741	0.602	0.500	0.632	0.501	0.601	0.601	0.509	0.901
D7								0.730	0.543	0.533	0.765	0.777	0.601	0.543	0.801	0.633	0.503	0.795	0.691
D8									0.821	0.800	0.643	0.501	0.503	0.811	0.543	0.700	0.654	0.692	0.732
D9										0.770	0.599	0.709	0.721	0.710	0.674	0.672	0.704	0.533	0.741
D10											0.622	0.692	0.898	0.603	0.766	0.501	0.601	0.677	0.811
D11												0.500	0.654	0.509	0.621	0.876	0.508	0.790	0.820
D12													0.801	0.799	0.590	0.543	0.761	0.676	0.821
D13														0.691	0.688	0.601	0.661	0.501	0.800
D14															0.771	0.578	0.643	0.732	0.723
D15																0.591	0.722	0.602	0.721
D16																	0.611	0.532	0.745
D17																		0.732	0.862
D18																			0.737

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level primary data

TABLE 2: Model summary for food heritage (independent variable) and identity (dependent variable)

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	%	SE	p-value
Identity (DV)	Constant				
Food heritage (IV)	0.921	0.848	84	0.471	<0.001**

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level primary data

The present study is in accord with a previous study by Park (2010), which reveals the importance of the socio-psychological dimensions of heritage that are essential in highlighting the interconnected nature of heritage and identity.

Moreover, whether food heritage is significantly impacting identity in the study area or not has been checked through regression equations (see Table 3).

For this regression analysis, the following equation was formulated to measure the impacts of food heritage (IV) on the identity (DV) of the study area:

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 (X_1) \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Identity} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 (\text{Food heritage})$$

$$\text{Identity} = 55.672 + 0.921 (\text{Food heritage})$$

Table 3 and the above equation show that if the dependent variable of identity is constant at 55.672, then the score of the independent variable (food heritage) is 0.921. That means if the value of an independent variable (food heritage) increases by one, the scores (55.672) of the dependent variables (identity) increase by 0.921. The p-value is <0.001, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, it is concluded that food heritage significantly impacts the identity of the destination. Hence, the proposed hypothesis H02 "There is no significant impact of food heritage on identity" is rejected and its corresponding objective "To measure the impacts of food heritage on identity" is achieved.

Identifying the determinants of food heritage in India involves examining the rich and diverse culinary traditions that contribute to its cultural identity and the tourism sector. Indian cuisine, with its diversity and long history, forms a significant part of the cultural identity of different regions. Each region's unique food habits and traditional cooking methods are integral to its cultural heritage, contributing to the overall tapestry of Indian gastronomy (Kaurav et al., 2024). This cultural richness not only preserves historical culinary practices, but also enhances the country's brand identity.

Destinations in India, such as Delhi, Mumbai and Kerala, have a strong association with their unique cuisines, which play a significant role in attracting tourists. These destinations are renowned not only for their historical and natural attractions, but also for their culinary experiences (Kaurav et al., 2024). Gastronomic interventions, including food festivals, culinary tours and the promotion of regional specialties, significantly enhance the travel experience. Such initiatives highlight the diversity of Indian cuisine, making it a pivotal element in the tourism sector. According to Kaurav et al. (2024), understanding

TABLE 3: Results of regression model for identity and food heritage

Model	Standardised coefficient	p-value
Constant (DV)	55.672	<0.001**
Food heritage (IV)	0.921	<0.001**

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level primary data

these dynamics is essential for crafting effective tourism policies that leverage India's gastronomic appeal, thereby boosting foreign tourism and enhancing the country's international image.

Moreover, Indian cuisine is not only a vital part of the cultural heritage, but also a powerful tool for economic development. Promoting local cuisines can significantly boost the local economy by supporting small-scale farmers, artisans and food producers (Meiselman & MacFie, 1996; Belasco, 2008). These activities not only create jobs, but also contribute to the preservation of traditional production methods and local ingredients. The economic impact of promoting culinary heritage can thus be substantial, fostering sustainable development in local communities.

Noticeably, the influence of religion on Indian culinary traditions is profound and significant, yet it has been notably absent from this study. Religion shapes food practices and customs, embedding them with deep cultural and spiritual meanings. For instance, *kada prasad* from Gurudwaras, *chana, halwa*, and *puri* at the Vaishno Devi Temple, *khichuri* during Durga Puja, and *meetha zarda* during the Urs festival at Ajmer Sharif are not merely dishes, but symbols of religious devotion and cultural identity. These foods are prepared and consumed in specific religious contexts, reinforcing the community's beliefs and values. The continuity of these practices across generations, as highlighted by Prentice (2003), underscores their importance in preserving cultural and religious heritage. By omitting the role of religion, the study overlooks a critical determinant of Indian culinary traditions. Future research should incorporate this dimension to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Indian food heritage.

The diversity of Indian cuisine, from vegetarian dishes in Gujarat to rich seafood in Goa, reflects not only geographical and cultural diversity, but also provides a rich experience for tourists. These experiences help build and reinforce India's brand image as a unique culinary destination (Can Emmez, 2020). Tourists often associate their travel experiences with the distinctive flavours and aromas they encounter, which can enhance India's brand image internationally. As Kaurav et al. (2024) suggest, understanding the importance of culinary tourism is crucial for crafting policies that can effectively utilise India's gastronomic appeal.

By working together, the Indian government and stakeholders can ensure the safeguarding, promotion, and continued appreciation of India's rich and diverse food heritage for generations to come. More specifically, the Indian government should establish a national council, integrate culinary arts into education, promote food-focused tourism, invest in research and encourage sustainable food practices. Supporting local restaurants, organising international food events and creating educational culinary programmes for tourists, and collaborating with international organisations and renowned chefs can help bring Indian cuisine to a global audience (Park, 2010). Simultaneously, restaurants should prioritise authenticity, culinary institutes should offer specialised training, and cultural organisations should host celebratory events. Media platforms should showcase Indian cuisine, and consumers should seek authentic dining, collectively preserving this invaluable cultural legacy. Such policies not only help preserve and promote traditional dishes, but also position India as a premier destination for culinary tourism. Moreover, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of research and documentation of culinary traditions to ensure they are not lost over time. This

includes recording traditional recipes, cooking techniques and historical stories related to food. These efforts not only help preserve the culinary heritage, but also provide valuable resources for future generations (Chhabra, 2005). Leveraging culinary heritage for tourism development is not only a smart economic strategy, but also a way to honour and protect the unique cultural values of the country.

## Conclusion

This study delved into the intricate relationship between food heritage, identity and tourism development, revealing a rich tapestry woven over generations. Using PLS-SEM and multiple regression analysis, we identified 18 key determinants that shape the perception of food as heritage. These determinants, deeply rooted in cultural expressions, historical practices and environmental interactions, highlight that food heritage is not a static entity, but a dynamic force constantly evolving alongside the communities it sustains.

Our findings confirm that food heritage is intrinsically linked to a destination's identity, fostering a profound sense of pride and belonging rooted in shared culinary traditions. In the face of rapid globalisation, preserving these authentic culinary practices emerges as a critical endeavour to safeguard cultural identity and uniqueness. This study provides a valuable framework for government authorities and stakeholders to understand the crucial role these determinants play in constructing both food heritage and a strong sense of place.

Moreover, our research underscores the potential of food heritage as a driving force for tourism development. Showcasing unique culinary experiences allows destinations to attract visitors seeking authentic cultural immersion, boosting local economies and enhancing their global image. Embracing a multi-pronged strategy that encompasses promoting regional specialties, developing culinary tourism initiatives and supporting local food producers is essential for harnessing this potential (Hamzah et al., 2015).

Ultimately, this research shows the profound significance of food heritage as a vibrant expression of culture, intertwined with identity and brimming with possibilities for tourism development. By recognising and celebrating its multifaceted value, we can ensure that food heritage continues to nourish communities and connect people, places and times for generations to come (Noor et al., 2013).

## Contributions, limitations, and future research directions

This study makes several contributions to the understanding of culinary heritage in India. First, it provides a comprehensive identification of 18 key determinants that shape and preserve Indian food heritage, using advanced statistical methodologies such as path analysis and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings highlight the intricate relationship among these determinants and their collective impact on cultural and personal identity. By employing a robust sample size of 696 participants, the research offers empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that food traditions play a crucial role in fortifying collective identity. Additionally, the study underscores the economic benefits of promoting local cuisines, as well as the potential for culinary tourism to enhance India's brand image on the international stage. These insights can

inform policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism and food sectors, helping to craft strategies that leverage gastronomic heritage for economic and cultural gains.

Despite its robust methodological approach, the study has several limitations. The reliance on an online survey may introduce biases related to internet accessibility and self-selection, potentially skewing the sample towards more technologically knowledgeable and urban respondents. Furthermore, while the study identifies and validates key determinants of food heritage, it does not delve into the dynamic interactions between these factors over time or across different socio-economic groups. The cross-sectional nature of the research also limits the ability to establish causal relationships definitively. Finally, the study focuses on Indian cuisine, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other cultural contexts or culinary traditions.

Future research should address the limitations identified in this study by employing longitudinal designs to better understand the evolution of food heritage determinants over time. Expanding the sample to include more diverse socio-economic and geographical groups within India would enhance the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, comparative studies involving other countries or regions could provide a broader perspective on the universal and unique aspects of culinary heritage. Investigating the role of digital media and globalisation in shaping contemporary food practices and their impact on traditional culinary heritage could also offer valuable insights. Further research could explore the economic impact of food heritage on local communities in greater detail, including the potential for job creation and sustainable development. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches combining anthropology, economics and cultural studies could deepen the understanding of how food heritage contributes to both individual and collective identities in a rapidly globalising world.

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