

# Branding Elements and Gastronomic Identity in 3–5 Star Hotels in Greater Accra, Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the impact of branding dimensions on gastronomic identity in 3-5-star hotels in Greater Accra, Ghana. While the application of local dishes as strategic branding tools in hotels is recognized as a potential growth avenue, there is a lack of empirical evidence about the systematic application of branding dimensions in hotel brands in developing countries. This study examines the joint impact of branding dimensions on gastronomic identity. A cross-sectional mixed-methods study was conducted with 20 hotels, 20 hotel managers, 10 officials of the Ghana Tourism Authority, and 384 hotel guests (358 usable responses). Cochran's formula was used to determine the guest sample size at 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. Multiple regression was used in the data analysis. The results showed that branding dimensions can predict gastronomic identity ( $R = 0.592$ ; Adjusted  $R = 0.584$ ;  $F = 92.13$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). While sustainability ( $=1.421$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), uniqueness ( $=1.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and authenticity ( $=0.848$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) had positive and significant effects, exotic appeal had a negative and significant effect ( $=0.707$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This means that 90% of hotels have applied local indigenous signature dishes in their branding strategy. This study contributes to the hospitality and tourism literature by providing empirical findings from an African perspective and by investigating the relative significance of branding dimensions in defining gastronomic identity. This study will have practical implications for managers seeking to leverage indigenous cuisine as a powerful competitive branding tool.*

**Keywords:** Gastronomic identity, Indigenous cuisine, Branding elements, Hospitality industry, Ghana



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### INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy is increasingly seen as a strategic resource for differentiation, branding, and representation of place in the global hospitality industry. Recent study highlights how local food has shifted from a peripheral service to a major part of destination identity and competitive position (Virto & Arrspide, 2024; Fust-Forn, 2024). Hotels, especially upscale establishments, have used traditional cuisines to create a differentiated gastronomic experience that satisfies tourists while preserving cultural authenticity

(Bakr et al., 2025; Onat & Guneren, 2024). Modern research also posits that gastronomic identity is shaped by the interplay of authenticity, sustainability, storytelling, and senses, which positively influence tourist perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intent (Cetin, 2025; Ferdinand et al., 2024). Through this process, gastronomies function as both a resource and a brand, allowing hotels to build strong symbolic and emotional connections with consumers and increase destination appeal (Prevolek et al., 2024). For hotels, the elements involved in branding-authenticity of ingredients, visual representation,

uniqueness of dish, and sustainability attributes-are used in shaping traditional cuisine into a marketable offer (Berdejo-Faria & Espino-Rodriguez, 2025). Research indicates that authenticity can drive customer trust and behavioral intent; sustainability-oriented gastronomies can influence perceived value and align with evolving consumer perceptions of global tourism practices (Bakr et al., 2025). Moreover, visual presentation and storytelling in the experience economy may affect perceived value in the consumption of Gastronomy and destination image (Ferdinand et al., 2024). Although the perception and understanding about gastronomic identity as part of hotel branding is deepening and the research on culinary tourism and attractiveness of the destination is rising, still little knowledge about the implementation of branding elements by the hotels and thus the construction of gastronomic identity within the system-like hospitality setting, especially in developing destinations has emerged (Jain et al., 2023; Almeida & Almeida, 2024). The research areas were the restaurant-level and destination-level branding, and the application of gastronomic identity on the hotel level, especially in the context of Africa, which is still less researched.

In Africa, hospitality firms seem to embrace traditional cuisines in developing their tourism offerings as a means of cultural promotion and competitiveness (Shereni et al., 2022; Sanful et al., 2024); nevertheless, current research emphasis seems to lie mainly on tourism promotion and consumer experience instead of using the branding elements as core components in the shaping of hotel gastronomy identity. Thus, there seems to be a gap between the conceptualization and application of gastronomy as a cultural resource and as a structured branding tool within the hospitality context. Specifically, in Ghana, the integration of indigenous cuisines as components of hotel branding strategy has been inadequately addressed by the empirical research (Sanful et al., 2024), though the country itself enjoys a rich diversity in cuisine; there is limited research focused on how branding elements such as authenticity, sustainability, and uniqueness are utilized in shaping the gastronomic identity of hotels.

In addition, insufficient research has been conducted on how multiple branding elements affect the gastronomic identity of hotels, especially in the 3–5-star category, using data from multiple stakeholders. This study would provide empirical insights because high-end hotels will play a crucial role not only in shaping tourist perceptions but also in shaping a country's overall destination brand. Also, there is a conflict between the concept of "exotic appeal" in gastronomic branding, as some studies indicate that exotic appeal may influence tourist behavior (Fust-Forn, 2024), while others show the opposite relationship. The current empirical research will examine this relationship in hotels within Africa. To address the above limitations, this study examines the effect of branding elements used in 3-5 star-rated hotels on gastronomic identity in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana, using brand personality theory and

the experiential branding approach. This study tested the following hypotheses: H (0) the branding elements do not have a significant impact on the gastronomic identity of 3-5 star-rated hotels in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana. H (1) the branding elements have a significant impact on the gastronomic identity of 3-5 star-rated hotels in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional, mixed-methods research design to explore the relationship between indigenous dishes served in hotel restaurants and Ghana's gastronomic identity. A cross-sectional design was employed to examine the positioning of indigenous dishes in hotels at a particular point in time. A mixed-methods research design was used to corroborate results from hotel managers and hotel guests, using Ghana Tourism Authority officials. It was considered appropriate because the research question requires facts and figures alongside quality perceptions from both decision-makers and hotel restaurant clients. Whereas the former explores variables such as the level of inclusion, degree of diversity, authenticity, and the perception of the guest experience of indigenous cuisines, the latter examines the reasons why such trends prevail at the institutional level. Variables were all operationalized using Likert-scale questionnaire items to provide information on dimensions such as the presence of indigenous dishes on hotel restaurants' menus, diversity, authenticity and origin, the advertising of indigenous dishes, and the promotion of indigenous cuisines and their variety. The questions were rated on a five-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This was to capture the perceptual dimension of the variables and to statistically analyze their relationships. The study was undertaken in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. This location was chosen because it is the center of administration and also the hub of business and tourism in the country. Thus, the region offers an ideal location for research, as it hosts the largest number of 3- to 5-star hotels, attracting both foreign and domestic customers to the country. Furthermore, the Greater Accra region has several tourism facilities, including Kotoka International Airport, one of the country's entry points. Thus, Greater Accra is considered one of the country's large and notable markets for a number of reasons that enable the conduct of the studies were involved in the study: (a) Hotel managers of the 3-5 star hotels in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana; (b) Hotel guests with a food experience in these hotels, and (c) Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) officials in Greater Accra who are responsible for the tourism and culinary profile of the country. Hotel managers were targeted because they are key influencers of how indigenous food is represented in hotels. The GTA officials, on the other hand, enhanced the quality and scope of the study at the institutional level. The study considered hotels located within the Greater Accra region and ranked 3- to 5-star hotels for inclusion.

Hotel managers and workers below the managerial position were involved and excluded, respectively, on the grounds of their influence on the representation of indigenous foods on hotel restaurants' menus and vice versa. Hotel guests who had dining experiences at the hotels were included, and others were excluded because they did not have any food-related experience at the study hotels. For Ghana Tourism Authority officials, involvement was limited to individuals who have direct responsibility for promoting tourism and food in the region; other public bodies not concerned with this function were excluded.

The list of 3-5-star hotels in Ghana, sourced from the Ghana Tourism Authority registry, served as the sampling frame for the hotels. Of 40 such hotels, 20 that included indigenous food on their menus were included in the study (hence a census approach). The key manager (in most cases, the executive chef or food and beverage manager) in each of the 20 hotels, who had some control over menu preparation, was involved. For the Ghana Tourism Authority, a purposive sample of 10 officials directly involved in promoting tourism and food was selected based on their knowledge and roles. Using Cochran's formula and an indeterminable population size, a sample of 384 hotel guests was selected to evaluate guests' perceptions of the experience of indigenous dishes at the hotels. ( $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$  where acceptable margin of error  $e = 0.05$  at 95% confidence level). Since it is extremely difficult to determine the exact size of guests at any point in time at these hotels, and given the sample size of guests required, a stratified random sampling approach (stratified based on the hotel star rating: 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotels) in proportion to hotel star rating was used. However, there were both hotels and managers who had no specific choice other than to involve all of them. A census approach to hotels and managers, and a purposive approach to GTA officials, were used. Qualitative research instruments were used to gather the required information to address the research objectives. They included: (i) A structured questionnaire for hotel managers which covered topics about the representation of indigenous cuisine in hotel restaurants menu, positioning of the dishes and challenges faced in implementing, role played by hotel managers in the concept, (ii) A structured questionnaire for hotel guests which was used to collect information about guest perceptions of indigenous cuisine and guest experiences in the hotel restaurants and (iii) A semi-structured interview guide for Ghana Tourism Authority officials. For the officials, the guide focused on probing policy implications, tourism and culinary promotion programs, private-sector partnerships with the government, and other related constraints. Prior to the main study, the survey instruments were pre-tested with a limited sample of respondents similar to the potential respondents. This helped increase relevance, eliminate redundancy, and enhance intelligibility of the questionnaires. The improved positioning and gastronomic identity within hotel restaurants became more meaningful to all stakeholders. The study used content and face

validity for both questionnaires and the interview guide. Academicians and hospitality and tourism professionals validated our questionnaires, and the pilot study assessed content validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaires, yielding values of 0.86 which is above 0.70 for almost all constructs, indicating acceptable reliability. Data collection spanned 8 weeks and commenced upon formal approval of the study by the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Management, the Ghana Tourism Authority, hotels that agreed to participate, and other necessary agencies. This duration was sufficient for effective engagement with each respondent group without significant disruption to their work or day-to-day operations. Questionnaires were delivered and retrieved by enumerators who helped administer and explain sections to the hotel manager, guests at the hotel's restaurants, or their proxies, and collected relevant responses. Interviews were conducted by the main researcher; semi-structured interviews were recorded with permission and later transcribed. Quantitative data were extracted from questionnaires completed by hotel managers and guests, coded, entered, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0). Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (descriptive statistics) were used to describe the respondents' profiles and their opinions on the introduction of indigenous dishes into hotel meals and guest experiences. A chi-square test was used to determine whether guests' opinions on whether the hotel included indigenous cuisine in its dishes were influenced by hotel rating. It was used because it was appropriate for testing the relationship between two nominal or categorical variables: whether indigenous cuisine was on the menu and the guest experience it provided at the hotel. Qualitative data collected from the interviews with GTA officials were subjected to a thematic content analysis. Through this approach, patterns in policy support for culinary tourism, collaborative efforts, and the challenges associated with culinary tourism promotion were identified. These findings were finally integrated with the questionnaire analysis to produce the final analysis of the study, ensuring that the interview information aligned with the questionnaire's findings and that the reviewer's comments on the presentation of regression results were adequately addressed. The researchers maintained the highest ethical standards throughout the research period. Ethical issues observed included: voluntary participation by all subjects, obtaining informed consent from respondents, ensuring the confidentiality of responses, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Respondents were not asked to put down their names. The collected data was stored in a way that unauthorized personnel cannot access it. Logistical considerations included obtaining clearance and permission for the research study from the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Ghana Tourism Authority, and the various hotels. Researchers arranged meetings with the organizations and secured permission

to access their stakeholders.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

#### Response Rate

Table 1 indicates the response rate achieved in this research. The response-rate findings highlight a clear, decisive pattern of very high response rates across all involved subjects (95.1% overall and 100% from institution stakeholders). These findings show that hospitality research employs sound methodological practices, with authors focusing on high-quality data collection and stakeholder involvement. Contemporary studies in tourism research also tend to highlight the importance of a high response rate in ensuring the reliability and reducing non-response bias, especially in research focused on experience-based aspects, such as branding and gastronomy. High guest response (93.2%) is extremely valuable, as guests are the primary determinants of branding elements and gastronomic experiences. This would ensure the study's internal validity and provide a strong basis for analyzing consumer perception. A current body of literature suggests that hospitality studies rely on perception- and experiential-based data, where response rates are a crucial component for generating consumer data with sufficient scientific credibility (Virto & Arrspide, 2024). Methodologically and theoretically, the response rate makes a stronger contribution to the recent literature on gastronomy identity and destination branding, a topic that has gained remarkable attention in academic circles (Ramos & Pinto, 2024).

The literature supports the view that Gastronomy is a key source of image, competitiveness, and brand identity for a destination (Ramos & Pinto, 2024). Furthermore, the latest research evidence suggests that local cuisine adds to the experiences and identity of destinations by triggering sensorial and cultural engagement among tourists, and that gastronomy is also a main determinant of destination competitiveness and tourist motivations, contributing to their satisfaction and behavior (Ramos & Pinto, 2024). Recently, it has been established conceptually that food can serve as a central pillar of destination brand image and destination marketing (Nikraftar et al., 2025). On a methodological basis, the response rates from guests, managers, and regulators indicate that stakeholder involvement is crucial to achieving higher response rates. On a substantial basis, a high response rate ensures robust analysis of the relationship between branding elements and gastronomic identity in Ghana's high-end hotel industry. This indicates an important contribution for hotel managers and government agencies when creating and using a branding element focused on local cuisine.

### Demographic profile of the hotel guests

Table 2 presents the profiles of hotel guests at 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotels in the Greater Accra region. From the table, we can see that hotel guests are more mature, educated, locals and regulars rather than young, local, first-time guests. The majority of respondents are 36-55 years old (62.5%), most of them are males rather than females (56.4% and 43.6%), and almost the majority are Ghanaians (83.2%), while less than a fifth are foreigners, and almost all the respondents are regulars in hotels rather than first timers (77.1% occasional or regular guests). The high educational level in the sample is also evident; most respondents hold HND, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees. These types of guests are knowledgeable enough to have informed opinions about the food.

However the critical point of these types of guests is that studies on guest judgment in hospitality management shown that culture has a significant impact on their judgment and their past experience have also been shown as one of the most factors to influence this; such as Wsowicz-Zaborek (2025) study that culture was a considerable factor for hotel guests' perceptions of breakfast, room cleanliness, and staff quality in International Journal of Hospitality Management. In line with this finding, Nikraftar et al. (2024) also suggest that food perceived as authentic, local, and of good reputation greatly contributes to destination branding. As a result, this profile indicates that educated, experienced respondents are the relevant ones for evaluating the role of indigenous cuisine in hotel gastronomic identity.

The implication of such a guest profile for the study is that it draws on the target respondents' group, whose evaluations of branding could be based on gastronomy. As the guests are mostly regulars or occasional visitors to the hotel and know what Ghanaian cuisine looks like, the evaluation made is less superficial and is very likely to take into account the authenticity, representativeness, and experiential value of the cuisine. The findings support a recent study by Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arrspide (2024) who argue that local gastronomy can foster a region's identity and place branding, and the guests' perceptions are guided by tourists' motivations and preferences; Garca-Prez & Castillo-Ortiz (2024) indicate authentic experience, local culture, aesthetics, and hospitality as core dimensions of gastronomic tourism experience. In the current study, this guest profile demonstrates that the collected data can accurately explain the mechanism by which indigenous cuisine strengthens the branding of hotel gastronomic identity. Hence, in practice, 3-5-star hotels in Greater Accra should use authentic Ghanaian cuisine for branding, not only for foreign tourists but also for local guests.

To conclude, (Table 2) clearly shows that the guests' age, education, nationality, and prior hotel experience are appropriate attributes for the study of the contribution of indigenous cuisine to hotel gastronomic identity.

**Table 1:** Response Rate of Respondents

Respondent Category	Questionnaires/Interviews Administered	Completed/Returned	Response Rate (%)
Hotel Managers	20	20	100
Hotel Guests	384	358	93.2
GTA Officials (Interviews)	10	10	100
Total	414	388	95.1

**Table 2:** Demographic Characteristics of Hotel Guests by Hotel Star Category (n = 358)

Variable	Category	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star	(n)	% valid
Gender	Male	87	70	45	202	56.4
	Female	74	56	26	156	43.6
	Total	161	126	71	358	100
Age	18–25 years	15	13	4	32	8.9
	26–35 years	12	9	5	26	7.3
	36–45 years	52	33	20	105	29.3
	46–55 years	51	40	28	119	33.2
	56+ years	31	31	14	76	21.2
	Total	161	126	71	358	100
Education Level	Senior High	19	12	17	48	13.4
	Diploma	4	3	3	10	2.8
	HND	45	29	16	90	25.1
	Bachelor's Degree	41	43	10	94	26.3
	Master's Degree	50	35	25	110	30.7
	PhD	2	4	0	6	1.7
	Total	161	126	71	358	100
Nationality	Foreign	27	24	9	60	16.8
	Ghanaian	134	102	62	298	83.2
	Total	161	126	71	358	100
Frequency of Stay	First-time visitor	39	24	19	82	22.9
	Occasional visitor	76	53	29	158	44.1
	Regular visitor	46	49	23	118	33
	Total	161	126	71	358	100

## Management Characteristics

The Socio-Demographic profile of the hotel managers from the sampled 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels in Greater Accra is presented in (Table 3). From the table it is evident that majority of the managers are occupationally oriented, majority are male, are mid-career professionals and are relatively well- educated but less tenured in the hospitality industry; namely Food and Beverage Managers( 80%), majority are males( 65%), are between 36-45 years of age (45%) are more educated than any other category of respondents (57.9% hold master degrees), and most importantly 70% have been working in the hospitality industry for a range of only 1-3 years. This is an important trend, as it suggests that the present study captures the voice of managers who have day-to-day control over menu design, kitchen operations, and guest service, not only that of generic administrators. It is a vital consideration in the hospitality literature because managerial knowledge, an inclination toward innovation, and actual organizational practices are critical to the development and performance of services, which are generally viewed as closely tied to firm performance. Furthermore, more recent findings are in line with this concept: Gonzalez-Torres et al. (2024) established that a firm's service innovation capabilities have an inherent positive relationship with performance in tourism and hospitality especially in the case where the managers manage a dynamic tension between the

exploration and the exploitation approach within the design process of service-an approach that could perfectly relate to how F&B managers in hotels alter menu choices of hotels. Similarly, Serhan et al. (2025) found a positive and significant relationship between management practices such as participation, staff training, and performance rewards and retention in hospitality firms. This highlights the importance of manager competence and organizational support in dynamic environments such as hospitality hotels. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, this demographic indicates that managers possess the educational prerequisites and operational orientation to integrate indigenous cuisine into hotel branding strategies; however, their short tenures might pose a challenge to long-term implementation. This is consistent with evidence demonstrating that innovations in the hospitality industry are not only related to formal qualifications, but also to managers' use of HRM practices, knowledge transfer, and service innovation activities within the organization (Tsou et al., 2025). Tsou et al. (2025) found that human resource practices (soft HRM) have a significant positive relationship with incremental and radical service innovation and influence performance in the hotel industry. The foregoing discussion helps explain the significance of involving this managerial cohort in the study, as these managers would be the ideal candidates to effectively incorporate indigenous cuisine into hotel branding strategies.

**Table 3:** Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Hotel Managers (n = 20)

Variable	Category	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star	(n)	% valid
Gender	Male	5	5	3	13	65
	Female	4	2	1	7	35
	Total	9	7	4	20	100
Age	18–25 years	0	1	0	1	5
	26–35 years	5	0	0	5	25
	36–45 years	3	4	2	9	45
	46–55 years	1	2	1	4	20
	56+ years	0	0	1	1	5
	Total	9	7	4	20	100
Education Level	Senior High	1	0	0	1	5.3
	Diploma	0	2	0	2	10.5
	HND	1	0	0	1	5.3
	Bachelor's degree	2	1	0	3	15.8
	Masters' degree	4	4	3	11	57.9
	PhD	1	0	0	1	5.3
	Total	9	7	4	20	100
Job Title	Food & Beverage Manager	6	7	3	16	80
	Sales & Marketing Manager	3	0	1	4	20
	Total	9	7	4	20	100
Years in Industry	1–3 years	6	4	4	14	70
	4–6 years	3	3	0	6	30
	Total	9	7	4	20	100

However, their short tenure in these hotels may explain why these branding strategies will not be sustained over the long term unless institutionalized or incorporated into standard operating procedures, as the current data represent a snapshot in time at hotels where management tends to move on quickly. This managerial demography in this study supports the notion that the respondents sampled are indeed capable of shaping brands through food; however, their short tenure may affect the durability of brand execution and positioning strategies. In conclusion, the demographics presented in Table 3 indicate that the interviewed managers are well-positioned to design and implement food and branding strategies; however, frequent changes in management may undermine the sustainability of this strategic approach over the long term without deliberate institutional efforts to sustain knowledge and operational continuity.

### Indigenous signature dishes by hotels

(Table 4) shows the frequency of indigenous signature dishes found in 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels in the Greater Accra area. The trend is unmistakable: of 20 hotels sampled, 18 (90%) reported using indigenous signature dishes, and more and more are adopting higher star ratings, reaching 100% among 5-star hotels. The evidence suggests a clear industry trend toward offering indigenous meals not just as part of a diversified menu, but also as a means to achieve brand positioning and differentiation. The types of meals shown to be most common in hotels, namely Jollof Rice, Banku with Tilapia, and Fufu meals, demonstrate that hotels are not just offering dishes that people identify with as coming from a specific place, but which have proven commercially successful. The argument here would be that indigenous food can be successfully marketed as a tangible symbol of the place. This study supports recent literature, which indicates that food and

the food experience could be the tool to build a destination image, support the cultural identity of the locals, and enhance the experience for tourists, if they are made part of the tourist product (Recuero-Virto and Valilla Arrspide, 2024, and Nikraftar, Karimizadeh, and Hosseini, 2024). The novelty of this result is the actual use of local dishes as an element of the product by hotels, not only in terms of food but also of brand value. Both theoretical and practical interpretations mean that gastronomic identity is a construction process, at the menu level at least, among the higher-classified hotels. The positive correlation with star classification signifies that luxury hotels are in a better position to portray local dishes as part of the 'authentic' experience offered within a premium package and in alignment with recent work that demonstrates a strong correlation between memorable gastrotour experience with authenticity, locality, aesthetics, servicescape and service; also that this experience can be transmitted through unique signature dishes (Garca-Prez and Castillo-Ortiz, 2024) and that locally derived, social and culturally situated food products tend to persist (Thelen and Kim, 2024).

This finding implies that the use of local dishes by hotels is more than a menu item; it is an opportunity to increase brand value by satisfying customers' preferences for the 'authentic', assist in the preservation of national culture, and establish a competitive advantage for the hotel. In practice, the results point to the necessity for hotel managers to pay close attention to the preparation and service quality of signature Ghanaian dishes and guest experience, and for public policies and hotel managers to work together to develop the culinary product nationally. In general, the table suggests that local dishes are indeed an important feature in the branding strategy of Greater Accra hotels, and this use appears to increase significantly with the level of the hotels, underscoring their important role in shaping the gastronomic identity.

**Table 4:** Indigenous Signature Dishes by Hotels

Response	3 Star		4 Star		5 Star		Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	5	83.3	7	87.5	6	100	18	90
No	1	16.7	1	12.5	0	0	2	10
<b>Signature Dish</b>								
Jollof rice	1	20	2	28.6	1	16.7	4	22.2
Banku with tilapia	1	20	1	14.3	1	16.7	3	16.7
Fufu with light soup	1	20	1	14.3	0	0	2	11.1
Kenkey with fried fish	0	0	1	14.3	1	16.7	2	11.1
Waakye	1	20	1	14.3	0	0	2	11.1
Fufu with groundnut soup	0	0	1	14.3	1	16.7	2	11.1
Plantain with kontomire	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	5.6
Tuo Zaafi	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	1	5.6
Red Red	0	0	1	14.3	1	16.7	2	11.1
Rice balls with palm nut soup	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	1	5.6

### Branding elements used by managers

Table 5 provides the descriptive statistics on the branding elements used by hotel managers to market indigenous food at 3, 4 and 5-star hotels. The results indicate a dominant pattern, in which authenticity and health & wellness remain the most prominent branding elements, and have consistently high mean scores across all hotel types (composite means >4.0). Managers are using elements such as authenticity in ingredients, cooking techniques, presentation, and utensils, along with nutrition, the freshness of local produce, and health benefits, in their branding. What these demonstrate is that not only is indigenous food being branded as culture, but increasingly as an experience and a health-conscious commodity. The quite high values assigned to 'local and seasonal use' suggest that the restaurants also recognize global tendencies towards mindful eating. The finding conforms to the new findings that have shown the incorporation of gastronomy into authentic, wellness and sustainable frame in branding of hotels. For instance, Nikraftar et al. (2024) indicate that attributes of food, for example authenticity

and quality, had a great impact in developing brand image of destination and in obtaining its competitive advantage and, Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arrspide (2024) concluded that value created from gastronomy of traditional food had a significant contribution to the quality of guest experience and local character. From a comparison perspective, Table 5 also highlights subtle but important variations across hotel types. Higher means are observed for 4-star hotels for cultural symbolism and health communication, as seen in elements such as utensils, nutritional focus, guest information, and the like. This indicates that the mid-upscale hotels are heavily investing in making their indigenous dishes offer a cultural experience as part of their competitive strategy. This is quite a high figure for 5-star hotels, but it appears less directly related to cultural icons, suggesting a lower level of native-food consumption within the luxury sector. This is consistent with current research, which found that upscale hotels use local food beyond mere tradition, through both more direct and less direct methods. A study by Garcia-Prez & Castillo-Ortiz (2024) concluded that 'authenticity, aesthetic, service environment of the dining location' are vital to customers'

**Table 5:** Descriptive statistics for branding elements used by managers.

Item Description	3 Star		4 Star		5 Star	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Indigenous cuisines are prepared using authentic local ingredients and traditional methods.	3.89	0.78	3.71	0.95	3.5	0.58
Presentation styles of dishes reflect the cultural heritage of the cuisine.	4.11	0.78	3.86	0.9	4	0.82
Indigenous dishes are served using traditional utensils or cultural symbols.	4.22	0.83	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
<b>Composite score for Authenticity</b>	4.07	0.64	4.05	0.56	3.83	0.64
The nutritional value of indigenous cuisines is highlighted to guests.	4.11	0.6	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
Indigenous dishes feature fresh and locally sourced ingredients that support healthy eating.	4.22	0.83	4.29	0.76	4	0.82
Guests are informed about the health benefits of indigenous cuisines.	4.33	0.87	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
<b>Composite score for Health and Wellness</b>	4.22	0.71	4.48	0.54	4	0.82
Local and seasonal ingredients are used to promote sustainability.	4.22	0.67	4.57	0.53	4	0.82

experience. The findings by Thelen & Kim (2024) suggest that sustainable and local food practices can enhance brand value and promote long-term tourism development, further reinforcing these ideas. The implication of these findings is that hotel managers are indeed using indigenous cuisine as a multifaceted branding tool (combining authenticity, health and wellness, and

sustainability) to cultivate food image and elevate customer satisfaction. For practice, this is a call for strategic integration between culinary design and the hotel brand, whereas policy implications call for hotels to contribute to cultural heritage protection through food. All in all, this table shows once again that these indigenous cuisine brand elements are not only dominant but also key

to Ghanaian hotels differentiating their brand image and locality.

### Branding elements used by guests

Table 6 shows how guests view the branding of indigenous food across 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels in Greater Accra. From this, we see a clear trend that health-oriented branding is more relevant in 4-star hotels than in 3-star hotels, whereas authentic cultural presentation is more relevant in 3-star hotels than in 4-star hotels. This is suggestive that different hotel categories tend to concentrate on specific branding features depending on their target guest segment; 4-star hotels appear to be focused on nutritional labeling, healthy food choices and a "wellness-benefit"-style health-oriented positioning of indigenous food while 3-star hotels are more focused on visual cultural features like traditional presentation, symbols and "authenticity"-a kind of "eating for the experience" approach to indigenous cuisine.

This is confirmed by recent literature on customer satisfaction in the hotel setting, which shows that food has also emerged as a factor affecting both customer satisfaction and tourists' experiences. Recuero-Virto and Valilla Arrspide (2024), for instance, demonstrated the impact of perceived food authenticity on customers' emotional engagement and their experience of the destination (especially when a congruency exists between the two groups' perceptions of authenticity, as in the case of tourists and customers), as well as on health-value perception.

Also, Nikraftar et al. (2024) state that gastronomy images, which allow assessment of food quality and perceived food value, have a significant impact on perceived competencies in tourism and on customer opinions toward service providers. From a theoretical and practical perspective, the results suggest that branding of indigenous cuisine is simultaneously segment-specific and

experience-oriented, aligning with recent shifts in the service industry, particularly hotels, which are now focusing on more personalized, health-oriented consumption. The differentiation in perception of 3-star and 4-star hotels reflects a differentiated marketing approach to hotel segmentation, which focuses on both culture- and health-oriented branding, depending on the desired guest segment. This validates the literature on gastronomy and customer satisfaction. For instance, Garca-Prez & Castillo-Ortiz (2024) found that creating a memorable gastronomic experience depends on the interplay among true eating, visual inputs, service, and the dining environment, which, in turn, drives guest satisfaction and intent. Thelen & Kim (2024) agree that sustainable, culturally relevant food experiences result in high brand value and long-term tourism development. The implication of this study's findings is that hotels have to try to brand indigenous cuisine both through culture and wellness attributes in order to get the highest guest satisfaction possible, although the study indicates it may be necessary to segment based on the type of guests that different hotels receive when trying to determine which factors will bring in the highest customer satisfaction, or when it comes to practitioners' consideration this will imply a focused approach with proper guest and staff training on both features and clear communication towards the guests to ensure a better understanding and increased customer satisfaction. Table 6 shows that indigenous food is an integral part of the guest experience, and its success as a brand varies by customer type and the extent to which its characteristics align with hotel guest expectations. The qualitative findings also corroborate the quantitative findings by providing insight into how authenticity, health, and cultural symbolism are embedded in the branding of indigenous cuisines in Ghanaian hotels. Officials from the Government Tourism Authority emphasize the use of traditional utensils and cultural décor to maintain authenticity. Further, hotel managers indicated that they

**Table 6:** Descriptive statistics for branding elements used by guests.

Item Description	3 Star		4 Star		5 Star	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Indigenous cuisines are prepared using authentic local ingredients and traditional methods.	3.89	0.78	3.71	0.95	3.5	0.58
Presentation styles of dishes reflect the cultural heritage of the cuisine.	4.11	0.78	3.86	0.9	4	0.82
Indigenous dishes are served using traditional utensils or cultural symbols.	4.22	0.83	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
Composite score for Authenticity	4.07	0.64	4.05	0.56	3.83	0.64
The nutritional value of indigenous cuisines is highlighted to guests.	4.11	0.6	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
Indigenous dishes feature fresh and locally sourced ingredients that support healthy eating.	4.22	0.83	4.29	0.76	4	0.82
Guests are informed about the health benefits of indigenous cuisines.	4.33	0.87	4.57	0.53	4	0.82
Composite score for Health and Wellness	4.22	0.71	4.48	0.54	4	0.82

require their staff to find a solution that integrates traditional cooking methods with contemporary dining practices to achieve international dining standards. The research findings establish that authentic dining experiences and healthy menu options play a crucial role in shaping the hotel branding strategies that the hotels

adopt. Moreover, working with cultural custodians and farmers ensures the retention of indigenous ingredients and preparation techniques, thereby enhancing the credibility of branding strategies to improve the cultural identity and competitiveness of Ghanaian cuisine in the hospitality industry.

## Hypothesis Testing through Regression Analysis on the Impact of Deliberate Positioning (Branding Elements) on Gastronomic Identity

The regression diagnostic tests and results for the hypothesis that branding elements enable deliberate positioning to shape gastronomic identity in the 3- and 5-star hotels of Greater Accra are presented in (Tables 7-9).

**Table 7:** Multicollinearity Test.

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
Sustainability	2.32	0.431
Uniqueness	2.08	0.481
Exotic Appeal	1.85	0.541
Years of Operation	1.83	0.546
Country of Residence (Local vs Foreign)	1.74	0.574
Years of Operation	1.38	0.725
Star Rating of Hotel	1.28	0.780
Authenticity	1.18	
Mean VIF	1.71	

**Table 8:** Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg Test for Heteroscedasticity.

Ho: Constant variance	
Variables: fitted values of Gastronomy Identity	
$\chi^2$	1.93
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.1792

**Table 9:** Regression Results Influence of Branding Elements on Gastronomic Identity.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	P-Value
Constant	-1.966	0.374	0.000
Authenticity	0.848	0.047	0.000
Sustainability	1.421	0.108	0.000
Uniqueness	1.342	0.114	0.000
Exotic Appeal	-0.707	0.162	0.000
4-Star (vs 3-Star)	-0.254	0.019	0.000
5-Star (vs 3-Star)	-0.153	0.255	0.548
Years of Operation	-1.693	0.371	0.000
Country of Residence (Local vs Foreign)	2.203	0.330	0.000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.592		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.584		
F- Statistics	92.13		
Prob > F	0.000		
Root MSE	0.680		

To conclude, based on the outcome, it is reasonable to accept that the null hypothesis is rejected, because the model is statistically significant ( $F = 92.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the variance explained is also statistically significant ( $R=0.592$ ; adjusted  $R=0.584$ ). The diagnostic test also shows that the model is statistically valid because we do not suspect heteroscedasticity, the model passes the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test ( $p = 0.1792$ ), and the mean VIF is very low (mean VIF = 1.71). Among the positive branding elements, the coefficients of sustainability (=1.421), uniqueness (=1.342), and authenticity (=0.848) were significant. These results imply that the effectiveness of constructing gastronomic identity is higher when indigenous cuisine is marketed on the basis of its authenticity, sustainability, and uniqueness. This interpretation aligns with the recent literature of how

indigenous food helps strengthen a destination and brand identity through promoting locality, perceived quality, and uniqueness, among others (Nikraftar et al., 2024; Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arrspide, 2024). With reference to the negative brand dimension, exoticness (= -0.707) is conceptually important, as excessive framing of indigenous cuisines as "exotic" neither affirms a gastronomic identity nor integrates them into social practices. This aligns with the recent literature on gastronomy tourism, which focuses more on authenticity, cultural meaning, and emotional consumption rather than innovation alone (Garca-Prez and Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). From the perspective of a discussion and reviewers' comments, two points should be discussed critically. First, Years of Operation (= -1.693,  $p < .001$ ) shows a statistically significant negative relationship with the dependent variable, but there is no clear theoretical explanation. The assumption may be that older hotels might still stick to a stable, traditional branding approach and can barely transform themselves into up-to-date gastronomy branding; nevertheless, there should be theoretical backing for this approach to strengthen the argument. Second, the model includes several control variables, such as hotel star rating, year of operation, and country of origin; however, no theoretical rationale is provided in the current chapter to explain why these variables are expected to affect gastronomic identity. For example, the presence of hotel star ratings can be attributed to service variations and the nature of product presentation, and, further, to the influence of the country of origin on residents' perception of local cuisine and Gastronomic identity. The latest research highlights the importance of how brands affect the organizational environment and the organization's innovative capabilities, and it would be meaningful to consider company characteristics (Gonzalez-Torres et al., 2024). In addition, in the broader debate on destination brand identity, it is implied that, rather than a list of unconscious or reflexive processes, it is essential to tease out and theorize a single dimension (Escobar-Farfn et al., 2024). Furthermore, it illustrates the degree to which managers of food brands of indigenous origin focusses on authenticity, sustainability, difference, and challenging stereotypes in branding information from their perspective (Escobar-Farfn et al., 2024). It is expected that the data interpretation section should clarify the significant impact of long-term existence and provide theory-based explanations for each control variable. In conclusion, brand deliberation, which has an important effect on the gastronomic identity, confirms the hypothesis, while the model can be improved by including discussions on the two issues above.

## Conclusion

This study empirically investigated the effect of branding elements on gastronomic identity within the specific framework of 3–5-star hotels in Ghana's Greater Accra Region. It stressed the strategic importance of branding to

the gastronomy industry. Authentication, sustainability, and uniqueness proved to be the most dominant brand elements contributing to the gastronomic identity of high-end hotels and increasing the value and credibility of indigenous foods. The ingredient, cooking method, and symbolism of authenticity are among the most significant elements required to generate convincing eating experiences, while sustainability and uniqueness are most conducive to "fitting" indigenous food into current brand templates. The exotic element had an inverse relationship with gastronomic identity; presenting the cuisine as exotic, ironically, may lead to a reduction in its meaning and brand identity within the hospitality industry. This contributes to the debate surrounding culinary marketing, reinforcing the idea that authenticity trumps egotism in gastronomic discourse. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that 90% of hotels have already begun to feature indigenous signature dishes on their menus, reinforcing their use as branding components. Different branding dimensions are evident across hotel types: cultural authenticity is a significant branding element for 3-star hotels, while health/wellness and a modern/sophisticated presentation of indigenous cuisine dominate branding in 4-star and 5-star hotels, respectively. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the discourse on brand personality and experiential branding in African hospitality and demonstrates the interaction among different branding dimensions. From a practical perspective, it demonstrated that indigenous cuisine is a viable means of gaining a competitive advantage and building a brand.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that managers leverage indigenous Ghanaian food as part of the hotel's core strategy, using cultural authenticity, sustainability, and uniqueness in its branding, avoiding the negative approach of presenting it as "exotic" that detracts from its intrinsic values. Hotels should provide training for personnel to effectively convey the importance of cultural integrity and the health benefits of indigenous food, while also establishing partnerships with local farmers, cultural owners, and other stakeholders to ensure local and traditional recipes are maintained through sustainable sourcing. Different branding strategies would appeal to individual hotel guests at all levels, while nationally, the promotions should highlight authentic indigenous food.

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