



Strategic Challenges In Promoting Regional Cuisine: Evidence From Maharashtrian Culinary Heritage

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Abstract

In an era of culinary globalization, the promotion of regional food heritage such as Maharashtrian cuisine presents both opportunities and challenges for restaurant managers. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), this study examines how four firm-level factors—consumer awareness, economic barriers, operational constraints, and marketing challenges—influence managerial intention to preserve and promote local cuisine. Data were collected from 125 restaurant owners and managers across major cities in Maharashtra using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that consumer awareness is the strongest enabler, underscoring the role of market knowledge as a valuable intangible resource that encourages strategic commitment. In contrast, operational and financial constraints emerged as the most critical deterrents, highlighting persistent shortages of skilled labor and concerns over profitability. Marketing challenges also reduced managerial intent, reflecting the difficulties of building strong brand equity in a competitive environment. Overall, the model explains nearly half of the variance in promotion intention, reinforcing that cultural preservation is contingent not only on consumer demand but also on a firm's ability to secure and mobilize its resource base. The study contributes theoretically by extending RBV into the domain of culinary heritage and offers practical guidance by emphasizing the need for investment in financial viability and human capital development as prerequisites for sustaining regional food culture.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, Maharashtrian cuisine, Culinary heritage promotion, Restaurant management

Introduction

In a rapidly globalizing world, the culinary landscape is experiencing an intense period of change, where the increasing standardization imposed by fast-food chains and modern, globally uniform dining concepts presents a subtle but significant threat to the survival of traditional, regional cuisines (Mathew, 2024; Ishak et al., 2021). This phenomenon extends beyond mere dietary habits; it risks the erosion of food diversity and the subsequent cultural identity, as local food heritage forms a profound cornerstone of societal traditions and distinct regional characteristics (Kim & Eves, 2012; Szpakowska-Loranc, 2021). Regional Maharashtrian cuisine, renowned for its historical richness, unique diversity, and authentic flavor profiles, stands as a critical example of this threatened heritage, often overshadowed by pervasive global culinary trends (Jayashree et al., 2025).

The context for this cultural preservation effort is the dynamically expanding Indian food services market, which was valued at 5.69 lakh crore in FY24 and is projected to surge to 7.76 lakh crore by FY28 (NRAI, 2024). While this booming industry, which contributes 1.9% to India's GDP and employs over 8.5 million people, signals vast opportunities, it simultaneously subjects restaurants to intense commercial pressures. The restaurant owners and managers who serve as the custodians of regional recipes are thus caught in a strategic dilemma: how to successfully balance the financial imperative of commercial viability against the social responsibility of cultural preservation (Amicarelli & Bux, 2020). This pressure is compounded by pressing barriers such as rising operational costs, difficulty in maintaining quality consistency, and intense competition from globally marketed brands (Udayalakshmi, 2024; Pal & Aradhya, 2020; Saraiya, 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of safeguarding food heritage, previous research has approached the challenge from fragmented perspectives. A significant body of work has concentrated on the consumer side, exploring how awareness and preference drive demand for local products (Kim & Eves, 2012; Fusté-Forné, 2023; Wenting et al., 2025). Concurrently, other studies have investigated specific, siloed challenges faced by food businesses: operational issues related to standardization and labor in specific segments like fast-food (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2009; Udayalakshmi, 2024), the difficulties of competitive pricing and quality maintenance (Pal & Aradhya, 2020), or the challenges inherent in promoting thematic and cultural food experiences within the hospitality sector (Ishak et al., 2021; Sharma & Srivastav, 2024).

Crucially, the existing literature suffers from a significant gap by largely overlooking the *strategic calculus* of the restaurant manager. Studies often treat the challenges as isolated variables rather than synergistic, firm-level barriers that collectively influence the managerial decision to invest in regional cuisine. Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of research that adopts a holistic framework to examine how

the combined effect of consumer, economic, operational, and marketing challenges impacts the **restaurant's intention to promote** this heritage from an organizational resource perspective. Understanding the managerial mindset—the primary strategic gatekeeper—is essential for developing effective intervention strategies.

This study directly addresses this knowledge gap by developing and testing an integrated framework, grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), that treats the promotion of regional Maharashtrian cuisine as a strategic intention influenced by multifaceted resource-related challenges. The primary objective is to empirically examine how the collective external and internal pressures—Consumer Awareness & Knowledge, Economic Barriers, Operational & Resource Constraints, and Marketing & Promotion Challenges—influence a restaurant manager's intention to preserve and actively promote regional Maharashtrian cuisine. By investigating these relationships through a managerial lens, this research contributes to the literature on culinary heritage, strategic management in the food industry, and regional cultural economics, ultimately providing detailed, actionable insights for stakeholders and policymakers committed to safeguarding food culture for future generations.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the **Resource-Based View (RBV)**, a widely used framework in strategic management that emphasizes the role of internal resources in shaping organizational outcomes (Penrose, 1959; Barney, 1991). According to RBV, sustainable competitive advantage arises when firms possess resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Rather than focusing solely on external market conditions, RBV underscores how a firm's internal strengths and weaknesses determine its strategic decisions and performance.

In the context of this research, the RBV offers a lens to understand how restaurants in Maharashtra approach the preservation and promotion of regional cuisine. The intention to promote Maharashtrian food can be seen as a strategic decision contingent on available resources and capabilities. The challenges under investigation—economic barriers (e.g., limited financial capital, profitability issues), operational constraints (e.g., shortage of skilled chefs, supply chain gaps), and marketing difficulties (e.g., weak branding, limited communication channels)—reflect deficiencies in these internal resources. Restaurants with valuable resources, such as experienced culinary talent or strong ties with local farmers, are better positioned to feature authentic dishes and preserve food heritage. Conversely, those lacking such capabilities perceive greater barriers, reducing their willingness to invest in regional cuisine promotion. Thus, RBV provides a robust foundation for examining how the evaluation of internal resources shapes managerial intentions to safeguard local culinary traditions.

Hypothesis Development based on Literature Review:

Consumer Awareness and Knowledge

Consumer awareness and detailed knowledge of regional cuisine act as a critical market-based resource (Chen et al., 2025). When managers perceive high consumer knowledge, they see a stronger market for authentic offerings, which directly enhances the perceived value and rarity of their Maharashtrian cuisine. This high awareness transforms the cuisine from a niche item into a valuable competitive asset, signaling that promotional efforts will yield positive returns. This trend is powerfully supported by market insights revealing a fundamental shift in consumer behavior. The 2024 Deloitte-FICCI report, for instance, highlights a rapidly rising demand for regional flavors in the retail sector, noting that consumers are increasingly returning to their roots and show a willingness to pay a premium for products that offer authentic, region-specific tastes (Deloitte, 2024). This measurable economic value tied to authenticity provides a direct financial incentive, positively influencing the management's strategic intention (Kim & Eves, 2012; Sharma & Srivastav, 2024). Thus, it is proposed that:

H1: Consumer awareness and knowledge positively influence restaurant intention to promote Maharashtrian cuisine.

Economic Barriers

Economic barriers represent a constraint on the firm's most fundamental resource: financial capital and profitability (Amicarelli & Bux, 2020). Promoting authentic cuisine often necessitates sourcing specialized ingredients and dedicating time to complex, traditional preparation methods, which inflate both raw material and labor costs (Pal & Aradhya, 2020). When these costs diminish operating margins, the culinary heritage becomes a non-viable financial asset. Quantifying this barrier, an economic impact analysis by CRISIL (2023) found that establishments sourcing authentic, non-perishable regional ingredients faced 25–30% higher raw material costs, compressing operating margins by an average of 8–10 percentage points (CRISIL, 2023). This direct financial risk makes the strategy of promotion less attractive, leading to resource re-allocation toward more profitable, standardized menus (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2009; Rao & Kumar, 2024). The study formulated:

H2: Economic barriers negatively influence restaurant intention to promote Maharashtrian cuisine.

Operational and Resource Constraints

The capability to deliver authentic Maharashtrian cuisine is a non-substitutable operational resource. This capability is dependent on two key elements: skilled labor and consistent supply chain access (Ishak et al., 2021). Operational constraints, such as a shortage of chefs trained in regional methods and the difficulty of standardizing complex traditional recipes, directly undermine the quality and consistency of the offering. This challenge is severe, reflecting a nationwide shortfall in specialized human capital. A sub-sector skill gap study by the Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) documented significant deficits across India's hospitality industry (THSC, 2024). Industry commentary suggests that formal training

coverage remains extremely low—only around one percent of the workforce—despite large projected demand for new talent (Hospitality Insights, 2025; Hotelier India, 2023). Such a severe deficit in skilled human capital forces restaurants to rely on inefficient, informal training, directly hindering the capacity to execute and standardize the cuisine, thus negatively influencing the managerial intention to invest heavily in its promotion (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2009; Udayalakshmi, 2024). Thus, it is proposed:

H3: *Operational and resource constraints negatively influence restaurant intention to promote Maharashtrian cuisine.*

Marketing and Promotion Challenges

Effective marketing and promotion translate the inherent cultural value of regional cuisine into a recognized intangible asset (a strong brand and reputation). However, independent regional restaurants often lack the scale and financial resources to compete with the extensive marketing budgets of large, globally branded Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) (Saraiya, 2025). This resource disparity is profound: large QSR chains and organized sectors command highly professional marketing budgets, dedicating significant portions of their revenue to branding, which drastically contrasts with the limited resources of independent establishments (PwC, 2025). This financial squeeze, often exacerbated by the high commission fees from delivery platforms, leaves minimal marginal capital for self-promotion and brand building (Restroworks, 2025). Furthermore, a persistent challenge cited by independent restaurateurs is the "inability to create effective digital content that tells a cultural story, hindering their efforts to build intangible brand equity around authenticity (Sharma & Srivastav, 2024). It is proposed that:

H4: *Marketing and promotion challenges negatively influence restaurant intention to promote Maharashtrian cuisine.*

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design to empirically test the hypothesized relationships. A purposive sampling technique will be used to recruit a sample of 125 restaurant owners and managers in Maharashtra who have direct experience with traditional cuisine. The data will be collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via both online and offline channels. This multi-pronged approach is crucial to achieving a realistic sample size from busy professionals. Initially, the survey link will be distributed through professional culinary associations and restaurant owner forums on social media. To complement this, a paper-and-pencil survey method will also be used, with researchers approaching restaurants directly to request participation from owners and managers. This direct, personal approach is expected to build trust and increase the response rate.

3.1 Measurement Scales

The survey instrument will consist of a section on respondent demographics and a series of multi-item scales to measure the study's constructs. All scales will be adapted from a review of extant literature to ensure academic rigor. The scales for consumer awareness and economic barriers were adapted from the work of Kim and Eves (2012) and Amicarelli and Bux (2020), respectively. Operational constraints items were drawn from Ottenbacher and Harrington (2009), while the marketing challenges scale was based on Dwivedi et al. (2021). The final construct, restaurant intention to promote Maharashtrian cuisine, was measured with a scale adapted from Chen and Tung (2014) and Ajzen (1991).

3.2 Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software to perform Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis will be conducted in two main stages: the evaluation of the measurement model and the evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model will be assessed for reliability and validity, while the structural model will be evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships by examining path coefficients and their statistical significance using bootstrapping.

4. Results:

The analysis of data obtained from 125 restaurant owners and managers in Maharashtra confirmed the robustness of the measurement instrument and the predictive power of the proposed structural model.

4.1 Respondent Demographics

The sample reflected a balanced mix of decision-makers, with managers (53.6%) slightly outnumbering owners (46.4%). Most respondents were experienced professionals aged 31–50 years (64%), ensuring insights from mid-career leaders. Data was drawn from key urban centers—Mumbai (25.6%), Pune (22.4%), Nagpur (19.2%), Nashik (16.8%), and Aurangabad (16.0%)—capturing Maharashtra's major culinary hubs. Notably, 32.8% had 5–10 years of business experience, indicating a strong base of industry knowledge.

Table 1: Sample details

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Role	Owner	58	46.4
	Manager	67	53.6
City	Mumbai	32	25.6
	Pune	28	22.4
	Nagpur	24	19.2
	Nashik	21	16.8
	Aurangabad	20	16.0
Age	21–30 years	27	21.6
	31–40 years	46	36.8
	41–50 years	34	27.2
	Above 50 years	18	14.4
Gender	Male	83	66.4
	Female	42	33.6
Business Experience	Less than 5 years	29	23.2
	5–10 years	41	32.8
	11–15 years	33	26.4
	Above 15 years	22	17.6

Source: Primary data

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model exhibited strong psychometric properties, establishing the reliability and validity of the latent constructs. All indicator outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017), with values ranging from 0.789 (EB1) to 0.921 (MC2), confirming indicator reliability. Internal consistency was robustly supported by Composite Reliability (CR) values (all >0.880) and Cronbach's Alpha (all >0.805). Convergent validity was established, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs was well above the 0.50 benchmark (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), ranging from 0.718 (Economic Barriers) to 0.815 (Consumer Awareness). Furthermore, discriminant validity was confirmed, as the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its highest correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), ensuring that each construct measured a distinct aspect of the model.

Table 2: Outer loadings, VIFs, and reliability

	Outer loadings		Alpha	CR	AVE
CAK1	0.908	2.826	0.887	0.930	0.815
CAK2	0.898	2.237			
CAK3	0.903	2.833			
EB1	0.789	1.590	0.805	0.884	0.718
EB2	0.872	1.880			
EB3	0.878	1.836			
MC1	0.872	2.063	0.859	0.912	0.777
MC2	0.921	2.302			
MC3	0.850	2.178			
OC1	0.877	2.137	0.854	0.911	0.774
OC2	0.890	2.129			
OC3	0.872	2.067			
IP1	0.864	-	0.880	0.917	0.735
IP2	0.885	-			
IP3	0.855	-			
IP4	0.825	-			

Table 3: Discriminant validity (Fornell Larcker criterion)

	Consumer Awareness	Economic Barriers	Intention to Promote Maharashtra Cuisine	Marketing & Promotion Challenges	Operational & Resource Constraints
Consumer Awareness	0.903				
Economic Barriers	-0.133	0.847			
Intention to Promote Maharashtra Cuisine	0.549	-0.334	0.858		
Marketing & Promotion Challenges	-0.303	0.089	-0.395	0.881	

Operational & Resource Constraints	-0.310	0.225	-0.468	0.322	0.880
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4.3 Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The structural model successfully demonstrated the relationships between the hypothesized antecedents and the restaurant's intention to promote Maharashtra cuisine. The model explained a substantial proportion of the variance, with the coefficient of determination (R^2) for Intention to Promote Maharashtra Cuisine reaching 0.469, indicating that the four challenges collectively account for approximately 47% of the variance in managerial intent.

Figure 1: Structural model evaluation

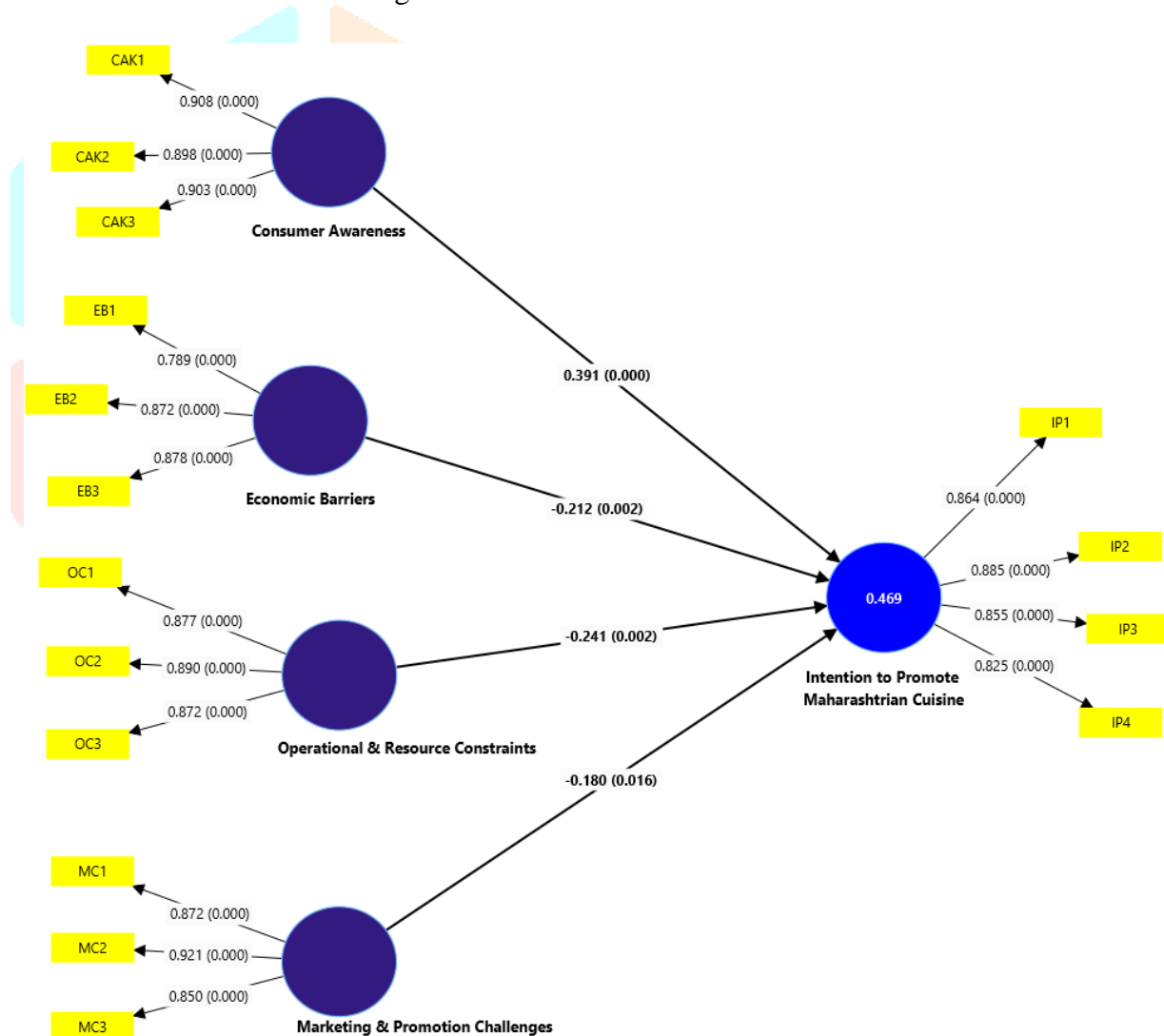


Table 4: Path coefficients results

	Coefficients	T statistics	P values	Result
Consumer Awareness -> Intention to Promote Maharashtrian Cuisine	0.391	4.517	0.000	H1 accepted
Economic Barriers -> Intention to Promote Maharashtrian Cuisine	-0.212	3.171	0.002	H2 accepted
Operational & Resource Constraints -> Intention to Promote Maharashtrian Cuisine	-0.241	3.151	0.002	H3 accepted
Marketing & Promotion Challenges -> Intention to Promote Maharashtrian Cuisine	-0.180	2.411	0.016	H4 accepted

All four hypothesized relationships were supported, underscoring the multifaceted nature of managerial intentions to promote Maharashtrian cuisine.

First, consumer awareness and knowledge exhibited a strong positive influence on intention ($\beta = 0.391$, $t = 4.517$, $p < 0.05$), emerging as the most powerful predictor. This finding affirms that managers perceive informed consumers as a critical market opportunity, driving their strategic commitment to regional cuisine promotion.

Conversely, economic barriers exerted a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.212$, $t = 3.171$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that profitability concerns substantially hinder willingness to invest in traditional food strategies. Similarly, operational and resource constraints showed a pronounced negative impact ($\beta = -0.241$, $t = 3.151$, $p = 0.002$), marking them as the second most influential deterrent. The shortage of skilled labor and challenges in supply standardization appear particularly paralyzing for strategic initiatives.

Lastly, marketing and promotion challenges also negatively shaped intention ($\beta = -0.180$, $t = 2.411$, $p = 0.016$), albeit to a lesser extent. The difficulties of creating brand distinctiveness and competing with global cuisines diminished managerial commitment, though their deterrent effect was comparatively weaker. Taken together, these results highlight a dual dynamic: while market awareness acts as a strong enabler of strategic promotion, economic, operational, and marketing-related barriers continue to constrain managerial intent in meaningful ways.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of resource-related challenges in shaping restaurant managers' strategic intentions to preserve and promote regional Maharashtrian cuisine. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the results confirm that intention is not merely driven by cultural sentiment but emerges as a rational response to the availability of valuable resources and the presence of internal and external constraints.

The strong positive influence of **consumer awareness and knowledge** (H1) confirms its role as a critical non-financial resource. This aligns with Kim and Eves (2012) and Fusté-Forné (2023), who emphasized consumer familiarity as a precursor to perceived authenticity and willingness to pay a premium for local foods. Our results extend this understanding by demonstrating that managerial commitment is significantly strengthened when consumer demand is perceived as both knowledgeable and engaged, effectively transforming cuisine into a competitive asset (Wenting et al., 2025).

Among the barriers, **operational and resource constraints** (H3) exhibited the most prominent negative influence. This finding reinforces RBV's proposition that inimitable and complex skills represent core resources (Barney, 1991). The acute shortage of chefs specialized in traditional techniques (see Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2009) magnifies the challenge, echoing Ishak et al. (2021), who identified skill deficits as a major impediment to authentic culinary innovation. Similarly, **economic barriers** (H2) were found to significantly constrain intention, consistent with Amicarelli and Bux (2020), who argued that profitability remains the non-negotiable foundation for sustaining small and medium enterprises. Financial risks associated with sourcing specialized ingredients thus reduce the attractiveness of regional authenticity strategies (Pal & Aradhya, 2020).

Finally, marketing and promotion challenges (H4) negatively affected managerial intention, albeit less strongly. This resonates with Dwivedi et al. (2021) and Sharma & Srivastav (2024), who observed that independent restaurants often struggle to build strong brand identities against the marketing dominance of global quick-service chains. The inability to effectively communicate authenticity and cultural value thus weakens strategic commitment.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Leveraging Consumer Awareness into Market Strategies: The strong positive effect of consumer awareness highlights that demand already exists for authentic Maharashtrian cuisine. It is suggested that managers capitalize on this by designing experiential strategies such as regional food festivals, curated tasting menus, and partnerships with local tourism boards. By embedding cultural narratives into dining experiences, awareness can be converted into repeat patronage and willingness to pay a premium.

Reducing Economic Barriers through Collective Action: Economic barriers emerged as a significant deterrent, pointing to the financial risks of sourcing authentic ingredients and preparation methods. It is recommended that restaurants collaborate with farmer cooperatives and industry associations to establish

shared procurement and distribution systems. Such collective arrangements not only reduce costs but also stabilize supply, making authenticity financially viable and sustainable for small and medium establishments.

Strengthening Operational Capabilities via Human Capital Development: Operational constraints, particularly the shortage of chefs trained in traditional recipes, had the strongest negative impact on managerial intention. It is suggested that restaurants work with culinary schools and hospitality institutes to create specialized training and apprenticeship programs in Maharashtrian cuisine. By investing in structured human capital development, managers can secure rare and inimitable capabilities that directly strengthen authenticity and long-term competitiveness.

Building Intangible Assets through Digital Promotion: Marketing challenges, though less severe, remain a barrier to strategic intent. It is recommended that managers adopt cost-effective digital strategies such as influencer-led campaigns, storytelling through social media, and immersive video content that highlights the cultural richness of dishes. These approaches reduce dependence on costly traditional advertising while enabling smaller restaurants to compete with global chains and build intangible brand equity around authenticity.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study's cross-sectional design constrains causal interpretation. Future longitudinal studies could examine how interventions such as training programs or financial subsidies alter managerial intentions over time. Moreover, the focus on urban Maharashtra limits external validity; applying this RBV framework across other regional cuisines (e.g., South Indian, Northeastern) would enrich comparative insights. Future research could also test moderating influences, such as institutional support or cultural orientation of managers, to refine the understanding of how personal and contextual factors interact with resource-based challenges.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the intention of restaurant managers to promote regional Maharashtrian cuisine is contingent on a balance between perceived opportunities and resource constraints. Consumer awareness serves as a critical enabler, while deficits in operational capabilities, financial viability, and marketing capacity act as significant deterrents. The findings highlight that cultural preservation becomes sustainable only when strategically viable. By focusing on developing skilled human capital, ensuring financial feasibility, and strengthening branding capabilities, stakeholders can enable restaurants to transform cultural heritage from a symbolic responsibility into a sustainable strategic practice.

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