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Assessing the effect of menu diversity on the development of the hospitality and tourism industry Kigali City, Rwanda

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Abstract: **This study assessed the effect of menu diversity on the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City, Rwanda. It focused on how offering a variety of food choices can improve customer satisfaction, strengthen the competitiveness of hospitality establishments, and contribute to tourism development. The study adopted a cross-sectional case study design using a mixed-methods approach. A total of 60 respondents participated in the study. Total enumeration was used for the quantitative component, while purposive sampling was applied to select key hotel personnel for interviews. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation checklists. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28, with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo. The findings showed that menu diversity was positively associated with hospitality and tourism development, with an overall mean of 4.32 and a strong positive correlation ((r = 0.895, p < 0.001)). Regression analysis also indicated a positive predictive effect of menu diversity ((\beta = 0.323)). These results suggest that providing a wide range of menu options can help hospitality establishments meet different customer preferences, improve dining experiences, and attract a broader range of visitors. The study concludes that menu diversity is an important consideration in strengthening the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City. It recommends that hospitality establishments regularly review their menus to accommodate diverse tastes, cultural backgrounds, dietary needs, and changing customer expectations. They should also use customer feedback, repeat visits, menu-item performance, and food and beverage revenue to assess the effectiveness of their menu offerings and identify opportunities for improvement. By aligning menu choices with customer needs and tourism trends, hospitality establishments can enhance their competitiveness and contribute to the continued development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City.**

Keywords: **Menu Diversity; Hospitality Industry; Tourism Development; Customer Satisfaction; Kigali City, Rwanda.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry contributes to economic growth, employment creation, cultural exchange, and destination competitiveness. Within this industry, food services form an important part of the visitor experience, as the availability and variety of food choices can influence customer satisfaction and perceptions of a destination. Menu diversity refers to the range of food options offered by hospitality establishments to accommodate different tastes, cultural backgrounds, and dietary requirements. Recent research has highlighted the role of gastronomy in destination choice, visitor experiences, and tourism competitiveness (Kuhn et al., 2024; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). These findings suggest that menu diversity can help hospitality businesses respond to different customer preferences and strengthen their appeal to domestic and international visitors.

Globally, gastronomy has increasingly been recognized as a means of diversifying tourism products and promoting destination identity. UN Tourism identifies gastronomy tourism as an opportunity to promote cultural heritage, support local economic development, and strengthen destination branding. Food experiences can also provide visitors with opportunities to engage with local traditions and explore different culinary cultures (UN Tourism, n.d.). In addition, Kuhn et al. (2024), in their review of research on innovation and creativity in gastronomic tourism, identified connections between culinary innovation, destination attractiveness, visitor experiences, and competitiveness. These developments demonstrate the potential importance of menu diversity as part of the broader effort by hospitality establishments to improve their offerings and respond to evolving market expectations.

Across Africa, gastronomy offers opportunities to diversify tourism products, promote cultural heritage, and strengthen destination competitiveness. In July 2024, UN Tourism, the Basque Culinary Center, and the Government of Zimbabwe organized the First Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa, highlighting the potential of culinary tourism to support sustainable development, cultural exchange, and community empowerment (UN Tourism, 2024). For hospitality establishments, offering a suitable range of local and international dishes can help meet the needs of visitors from different backgrounds while creating opportunities to promote regional food traditions. However, the benefits of menu diversity depend on the relevance of available choices to customers, affordability, ingredient availability, and the ability to maintain consistent food quality.

In East Africa, the hospitality and tourism industry serves visitors travelling for leisure, business, conferences, education, and other purposes. Such diversity in travel motivations creates demand for food services that accommodate different preferences and expectations. Hospitality establishments can respond by offering a balanced selection of traditional and international dishes, vegetarian meals, and other dietary options. A study by Wondirad and Verheye (2023), involving respondents from 45 countries, found that gastronomy influenced destination choice for many participants, reinforcing the importance of food experiences in tourism. Although the study was international rather than specific to East Africa, its findings provide a useful basis for examining the relevance of menu diversity to hospitality and tourism development in the region.

In Rwanda, tourism continues to contribute to national economic development and international visibility. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB, 2025), the tourism sector generated USD 647 million in revenue in 2024, compared with USD 620 million in 2023. The sector also welcomed approximately 1.36 million visitors, while the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) segment generated USD 84.8 million. More recently, the RDB (2026) reported that tourism revenue reached USD 685 million in 2025, accompanied by 1.49 million visitor arrivals and USD 94.7 million in MICE revenue. These figures illustrate the growing economic significance of tourism and the need for hospitality establishments to offer services that respond to visitors' expectations. However, the statistics do not establish the specific contribution of menu diversity, making further investigation of food-service factors relevant to the sector's development.

Kigali City is an important setting for examining menu diversity because it accommodates hotels, restaurants, business travellers, conference delegates, and leisure visitors. Data from the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR, 2025) indicate that Rwanda receives non-resident travellers arriving by both air and land and records travel expenditure associated with different purposes, including holidays and business. This range of visitor profiles creates a need for hospitality establishments to provide food options that respond to different culinary preferences and dietary requirements. By offering suitable menu choices, hotels and restaurants may improve the dining experience, serve a wider customer base, and strengthen their competitiveness within Kigali City's hospitality market.

Menu diversity involves more than simply increasing the number of dishes available. It also concerns the range, relevance, and suitability of food choices offered to customers. A well-designed menu can accommodate different tastes, cultural backgrounds, dietary needs, and spending capacities. Recent research by Recuero-Virto and Valilla Arróspide (2024) emphasizes the relationship between culinary experiences, destination image, visitor motivations, and regional tourism development. Similarly, Wondirad and Verheye (2023) demonstrate that gastronomy can influence destination choice and shape visitors' perceptions of tourism destinations. Although these studies examine gastronomy more broadly, they provide a useful foundation for investigating whether menu diversity contributes to customer satisfaction, business competitiveness, and tourism development in Kigali City.

Despite the growing recognition of gastronomy in tourism research, further context-specific evidence is needed on the effect of menu diversity on hospitality and tourism development in Rwanda. Existing studies have examined gastronomy in relation to destination choice, culinary experiences, and destination attractiveness (Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arróspide, 2024; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). However, these broader findings do not establish how menu diversity specifically relates to hospitality and tourism development within Kigali City's hotel sector. This distinction is important because the availability of varied menu options may have different implications depending on customer preferences, the nature of the establishment, and the characteristics of the local tourism market. The present study therefore addresses a context-specific research gap by examining menu diversity in relation to hospitality and tourism development in Kigali City.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional case study design using a mixed-methods approach. The cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected within a defined study period, enabling the researcher to examine respondents' perceptions and experiences of international gastronomy at a particular point in time.

2.2 Target Population

The study population comprised 60 eligible respondents associated with Grand Legacy Hotel and relevant to the investigation of international gastronomy and hospitality and tourism development.

2.3 Sample Size Determination

The study targeted 60 eligible guests and hotel staff at Grand Legacy Hotel. Of the 60 questionnaires distributed, 54 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 90%. The 54 valid responses constituted the final quantitative sample used for data analysis.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

The study employed three complementary data collection methods: questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews, and observation.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender of Respondents

Gender was examined to establish the distribution of respondents and to determine whether the study captured perspectives from different gender groups. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	32	53.33
Female	27	45.00
Prefer not to say	1	1.67
Total	**60**	**100.00**

Source: Primary Data (2026)

In Table 1, the gender distribution of respondents revealed a relatively balanced representation, contributing to the diversity and credibility of the study findings. Out of a total sample size of 60 respondents, 32 participants were male, accounting for 53.33%, while 27 participants were female, representing 45.00%. Additionally, a small proportion of 1 respondents (1.67%) preferred not to disclose their gender.

It is important to note that respondents who participated in the pilot test were not included in the main data collection to avoid bias and ensure the validity of the study. Overall, the findings indicate that the study captured perspectives across different gender groups, providing a comprehensive understanding of the influence of international gastronomy on hospitality and tourism development.

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Perceived in the hospitality and tourism sector at Grand Legacy Hotel. The predominance of male respondents, though slight, could reflect broader patterns in the hospitality industry in Rwanda, where more men than women tend to travel or engage in formal hospitality-related roles (Mutuku, 2021). The nearly equivalent female representation suggests growing inclusivity and participation of women in both leisure and professional spheres within the tourism sector, aligning with recent observations by Adekunle (2023), who noted a surge in female consumer engagement in East Africa's hospitality market.

The investigation into the respondents' gender as indicated by Table 1 found out that both male and female guests contributed significantly to the discourse on international gastronomy, indicating its cross-gender relevance in enhancing guest satisfaction and promoting cultural tourism. One female respondent shared her view, stating, "Experiencing diverse cuisines at Grand Legacy Hotel made me feel both welcomed and connected to different cultures in one setting," underlining the emotional and inclusive power of gastronomy. These findings affirm the gender- neutral appeal of culinary experiences and support policy drives such as the Rwanda Gender Policy (MINIJUST, 2022), which encourages equitable participation in socio-economic activities, including tourism and hospitality. In conclusion, the gender distribution in this study reflects a balanced engagement with international gastronomy across genders and confirms that culinary tourism is a shared cultural and commercial space.

Frequency of Visits to Grand Legacy Hotel

Visit frequency reflects the level of familiarity and engagement respondents have with the hotel's gastronomic offerings. Regular visitors may offer deeper insights into culinary trends and service consistency, while first-time guests can provide fresh perspectives. The table below highlights how often respondents have visited Grand Legacy Hotel.

Table 2: Frequency of Visits to Grand Legacy Hotel

Visit Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
First time	25	41.67
Occasionally	22	36.67
Frequently	13	21.67
Total	**60**	**100.00**

In Table 2, the frequency of visits to Grand Legacy Hotel indicates that 25 respondents (41.67%) were first-time visitors, while 22 respondents (36.67%) visited occasionally. Additionally, 13 respondents (21.67%) reported visiting the hotel frequently.

These findings suggest that the hotel attracts a mix of new and returning customers, reflecting both strong market appeal and customer retention. The presence of frequent and occasional visitors indicates that the hotel served both returning and first-time customers. The relatively high proportion of first-time visitors also demonstrates the importance of understanding how international gastronomy contributes to the initial guest experience.

These findings affirm the importance of international gastronomy in influencing guest behavior and reinforce the need for strategic investment in quality cuisine and service delivery, as also supported by Rwanda's National Tourism Policy (RDB, 2023), which encourages culinary excellence as a driver of tourism development. Thus, the data reveals that Grand Legacy Hotel is positively positioned as a competitive player in the gastronomic hospitality landscape in Rwanda.

3.3 Presentation of Findings

This section is structured in such a way to find answers to research study. Views and opinions have been collected from the questions set by the researcher, and the data gathered from the respondents.

3.3.1 Effect of Menu Diversity on the Development of Hospitality and Tourism in Rwanda

Menu diversity was examined as one of the dimensions of international gastronomy. The study considered the availability of different international cuisines, variety of menu choices, accommodation of different dietary preferences, and the ability of the hotel to respond to changing guest expectations.

The available qualitative evidence indicates that menu diversity is perceived as an important component of the international gastronomy experience at Grand Legacy Hotel. Offering different culinary options enables the hotel to serve guests with diverse cultural backgrounds and preferences. The findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies menu variety as an important consideration in hospitality establishments serving diverse customer groups.

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The findings further suggest that menu diversity should be accompanied by appropriate food quality, consistency and service capability. Simply increasing the number of dishes may not necessarily improve the guest experience if quality and service standards are not maintained.

The evidence supports the view that menu diversity is an important component of international gastronomy and has potential to contribute to guest experience and the attractiveness of the hotel within the hospitality and tourism sector.

Table 3: Effect of Menu Diversity on the Development of Hospitality and Tourism

Statements	SD=1 f(%)	D=2 f(%)	N=3 f(%)	A=4 f(%)	SA=5 f(%)	Mean	Std
The hotel offers a wide variety of international cuisines.	1 (1.05)	2 (2.11)	3 (3.16)	50 (52.63)	39 (41.05)	4.31	0.73
The menu is updated regularly to reflect seasonal and global trends.	-	2 (2.11)	3 (3.16)	52 (54.74)	38 (40.00)	4.33	0.64
The menu caters for specific Dietary preferences (e.g., halal/vegetarian).	1 (1.05)	1 (1.05)	4 (4.21)	48 (50.53)	41 (43.16)	4.34	0.71
Menu variety enhances my Dining experience at the hotel.	-	2 (2.11)	4 (4.21)	49 (51.58)	40 (42.11)	4.34	0.66
The availability of diverse cuisines influence my choice of Hotel.	1 (1.05)	2 (2.11)	3 (3.16)	51 (53.68)	38 (40.00)	4.29	0.72
Average						**4.32**	**0.69**

Source: Primary Data (2025)

In Table 3, which explores the effect of menu diversity on the development of hospitality and tourism, the findings show a predominantly positive perception among the 60 respondents regarding the role of diverse food options in enhancing guest experience at Grand Legacy Hotel. The statement that "The hotel offers a wide variety of international cuisines" received 50 responses (52.63%) for "Agree" and 39 (41.05%) for "Strongly Agree," totaling a combined 93.68% approval, with a mean score of 4.31 and a standard deviation of 0.73. Only a small portion, 1 respondent (1.05%) "Strongly Disagreed," 2 (2.11%) "Disagreed," and 3 (3.16%) remained "Neutral." The second item, on menu updates reflecting seasonal and global trends, had 52 respondents (54.74%) agreeing and 38 (40.00%) strongly agreeing, totaling 94.74%, yielding a mean of 4.33 and standard deviation of 0.64, with no "Strongly Disagree" responses.

Furthermore, the statement on catering to specific dietary preferences such as halal or vegetarian showed equally strong support, with 48 (50.53%) agreeing and 41 (43.16%) strongly agreeing, giving a mean of 4.34 and standard deviation of 0.71. Similarly, when asked whether menu variety enhances their dining experience, 49 (51.58%) agreed and 40 (42.11%) strongly agreed, reflecting a mean of 4.34 and SD of 0.66. The final item, concerning diverse cuisines influencing hotel choice, saw 51 (53.68%) agreeing and 38 (40.00%) strongly agreeing, resulting in a mean of 4.29 and SD of 0.72. The average mean across all five items was 4.32 with a standard deviation of 0.69. These results align with recent studies by Mugisha (2023) and Adebayo (2021), who found that offering diverse culinary experiences significantly increases tourist satisfaction and loyalty in East African hospitality settings. One respondent emphasized, "The international selection is what keeps me coming back; it feels like traveling the world through food." These insights affirm that menu diversity is not only appreciated but strategically essential for hospitality growth, particularly in international-standard hotels operating in culturally diverse tourism destinations like Rwanda.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES FROM KEY INFORMANTS

The key informants shared their views on how menu diversity contributes to the development of the hospitality and tourism industry at Grand Legacy Hotel in Kigali City. Their responses highlighted the importance of offering a variety of dishes to meet guests' different tastes, cultural backgrounds, and dietary needs.

Respondent One, a senior chef at Grand Legacy Hotel, explained that menu diversity helps the hotel serve guests from different parts of the world. The respondent stated that, "Menu diversity is one of our biggest attractions. Guests from Europe, Asia, and neighboring African countries always ask about specific cultural dishes. When they find them on our menu, they feel more welcome and satisfied." This response shows that guests appreciate having food choices that reflect their preferences and cultural backgrounds. The informant also highlighted the importance of providing halal and vegetarian meals to accommodate different dietary requirements. These observations suggest that a diverse menu can make guests feel more comfortable and improve their overall dining experience.

Respondent Two, a hotel manager, emphasized the need to understand guests' preferences when planning the menu. The respondent explained that customers are more likely to appreciate a hotel's food services when they can choose from a variety of suitable dishes. This observation highlights the importance of reviewing menus regularly and introducing options that respond to changing customer expectations. It also suggests that menu diversity should focus not only on the number of dishes available but also on their suitability, affordability, and appeal to different customers.

Respondent Three, a customer service trainer at the hotel, pointed out that menu diversity should be supported by good food quality and attentive service. The respondent observed that guests value having several options, but their satisfaction also depends on how well the food is prepared and served. This suggests that providing a diverse menu is only part of creating a positive dining experience.

Consistent food quality, attractive presentation, and professional service are also important in ensuring that guests enjoy the meals they select. Respondent Four, a senior official at the Rwanda Development Board, highlighted the importance of improving hospitality services to meet the expectations of visitors. The respondent noted that offering a wider range of food choices can help hotels serve customers from different markets and improve the overall visitor experience. This perspective suggests that menu diversity can complement Rwanda's tourism promotion efforts by making hospitality services more responsive to the needs of domestic and international visitors.

The key informants' responses indicate that menu diversity can help Grand Legacy Hotel accommodate different guest preferences and improve the dining experience. Their views also highlight the importance of regularly reviewing menu options, considering dietary requirements, and maintaining consistent food quality. These findings complement the quantitative results by providing practical explanations of how menu diversity may contribute to the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City. However, the findings reflect the experiences of the selected informants and should be considered alongside the quantitative results when interpreting the overall contribution of menu diversity.

5. SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Secondary data were reviewed to provide context for the study findings on the effect of menu diversity on the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City, Rwanda. The review focused on relevant tourism reports, hospitality publications, and policy documents that could help explain the role of food services in attracting visitors, improving guest experiences, and strengthening the competitiveness of hospitality establishments.

Reports published by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) highlight the importance of tourism to Rwanda's economy and the continued development of the country's hospitality sector. The growth of tourism and business events in Kigali creates opportunities for hotels to improve their services and respond to the preferences of domestic and international visitors. In this context, menu diversity may help hospitality establishments accommodate different cultural backgrounds and dietary requirements while providing guests with a wider range of dining options.

At the hotel level, menu diversity can support efforts to improve customer satisfaction and respond to changing market demand. Offering a suitable selection of local and international dishes may help hotels appeal to different customer groups, including leisure travellers, business visitors, and conference delegates. However, the extent to which menu diversity improves bookings, repeat visits, or revenue depends on other factors, including food quality, pricing, service standards, and the overall guest experience. Therefore, such outcomes should be established using reliable hotel records rather than assumed from the availability of diverse menu options.

The wider East African tourism context also demonstrates the relevance of food services to hospitality development. Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda attract visitors with varied culinary preferences, creating opportunities for hotels and restaurants to differentiate their offerings through food. In Kigali City, where hospitality services support business travel,

conferences, and leisure tourism, menu diversity can help establishments respond to these varied expectations. Nevertheless, evidence from neighbouring countries should be interpreted in its own context and should not be treated as direct evidence of the effects of menu diversity at Grand Legacy Hotel.

The secondary data therefore provide a broader context for interpreting the study's primary findings. They suggest that menu planning and the range of available food choices are relevant considerations for hospitality establishments seeking to improve customer experiences and remain competitive. When considered alongside the questionnaire responses and key-informant interviews, the documentary evidence helps explain why menu diversity deserves attention in hotel management and tourism development.

The secondary data support the relevance of examining menu diversity in Kigali City's hospitality sector. However, specific claims about changes in hotel bookings, customer satisfaction, tourism revenue, or national gastronomy programmes should be included only when supported by verifiable reports or documented hotel records. This approach ensures that the analysis remains focused on the study title and that conclusions about the contribution of menu diversity are based on credible evidence.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that authenticity of cuisine plays an important role in creating enjoyable and culturally meaningful dining experiences for hotel guests. Preserving the distinctive ingredients, preparation methods, cooking techniques, and cultural traditions associated with different cuisines helps hotels maintain the identity of the dishes they offer and meet guests' expectations. Authentic food experiences can also make a hotel stand out by offering guests something distinctive and memorable.

In Kigali City, where hotels serve both local and international visitors, authentic cuisine provides an opportunity to introduce guests to different culinary traditions while respecting their cultural preferences. When combined with menu diversity, authenticity allows hotels to offer a wider range of dishes without losing the characteristics that make each cuisine unique. This can improve the dining experience, strengthen guest satisfaction, and enhance the hotel's competitiveness.

The study therefore emphasizes the importance of maintaining culinary authenticity as part of effective food and beverage management. Hotels should ensure that appropriate ingredients are used, preparation methods reflect the intended cuisine, and kitchen staff have the necessary knowledge and skills. By maintaining these practices while responding to changing customer preferences, hospitality establishments can provide more satisfying dining experiences, strengthen their reputation, and contribute to the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Rwanda.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the study findings and focus on improving menu diversity to support the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City, Rwanda.

Grand Legacy Hotel should regularly review and diversify its menu to meet the different tastes, cultural backgrounds, and dietary needs of its guests. Offering a suitable mix of traditional Rwandan dishes and international cuisine would help the hotel serve both local and international visitors and provide a more satisfying dining experience. Management should also ensure that menu choices remain affordable and that food quality is maintained consistently.

The hotel should seek regular feedback from guests to understand their preferences and identify areas where the menu could be improved. It should also monitor the popularity of individual dishes and food and beverage sales to guide menu planning and ensure that available options reflect customer demand. These measures would help Grand Legacy Hotel attract a wider range of customers, strengthen its competitiveness, and contribute to the development of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kigali City.

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