

Aalborg University

Department of Cultural and Learning

Masters in Tourism

**Culinary Experiences in Kathmandu Valley: A  
Comprehensive Exploration of Tourists' Perspectives on  
Authentic Newari Cuisine and their revisit intention**

**Master's Thesis 2024**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine in the Kathmandu Valley, focusing on the interplay between authenticity, hygiene, and revisit intentions. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research draws on primary data collected through structured interviews with tourists and secondary data from YouTube vlogs and comments. The findings indicate that Newari cuisine is seen as authentic and culturally significant, though interpretations of authenticity vary among tourists, with some focusing on traditional preparation and others on sensory experiences. Hygiene concerns, especially with non-vegetarian dishes, significantly impact dining comfort, with tourists preferring establishments that adhere to international hygiene standards. While there is interest in Newari cuisine, revisit intentions are mixed, with online influencers showing more enthusiasm than the general tourist population. The study suggests balancing authenticity and hygiene to enhance the culinary experience and recommends expanding future research to include diverse stakeholders and sustainability considerations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The relationship between food and tourism is increasingly recognized as a key area of academic inquiry and practical application within the tourism industry. Food serves as more than mere sustenance; it is a multifaceted component that significantly enhances the travel experience, encompassing cultural, economic, social, and promotional dimensions (Andersson et al., 2017; Renko et al., 2010). As culinary experiences continue to gain prominence, understanding their impact on tourists' travel decisions and overall satisfaction has become crucial for destinations aiming to attract and retain visitors. Traditional dishes and local culinary practices provide tourists with authentic experiences that deepen their understanding and appreciation of the destination's heritage and lifestyle. This cultural connection fosters a sense of place and identity, making food an integral part of the destination's appeal (Kocevski and Risteski, 2018).

However, the significance of food in tourism also presents challenges. Ensuring the authenticity and quality of local food offerings is essential but often difficult to maintain (Zhang et al., 2019). The modernization of traditional cuisines can sometimes lead to a loss of authenticity, which may disappoint tourists seeking genuine experiences. Further, authentic culinary experiences often require the use of traditional ingredients, time-honoured cooking methods, and skilled craftsmanship, all of which can increase production costs (Angelopoulos et al., 2019). These higher costs may be reflected in the pricing of the food, potentially making authentic local cuisine more expensive compared to more standardized or mass-produced alternatives. Consequently, this can affect the pricing competitiveness of authentic food offerings, as tourists may weigh the value of authenticity against cost considerations. Balancing the demands of tourism with the preservation of culinary heritage requires careful management and thoughtful strategies.

The symbiotic relationship between gastronomy and tourism has undergone a transformative evolution, markedly accentuated in contemporary times by the emergence of a distinct cohort of travellers—food tourists. It is widely recognized that food serves as a significant motivator for tourists in the process of making travel decisions (Renko et al., 2010; Sengel et al., 2015; Kocevski and Risteski, 2018). While extant research has diligently explored the significance of culinary experiences in the tourism domain, placing a notable emphasis on the authenticity of local cuisine, an underexplored facet pertains to tourists' concurrent concerns regarding the adaptive dimensions of their journeys. Despite an overarching positive attitude towards

indigenous gastronomy, tourists frequently manifest apprehensions regarding various logistical aspects integral to their travel experiences. As posited by Cohen and Avieli (2004), these concerns extend beyond the mere pleasure of novel culinary encounters to encompass essential adaptative elements such as climatic conditions, accommodation arrangements, health considerations, and notably, the assurance of access to safe, edible, and palatable food and beverages. Therefore, food plays a crucial role in tourism, embodying both cultural and traditional significance while also serving as a source of energy and experiential value. It is essential that tourists have a positive experience with the cuisine of their destination, as it contributes significantly to their overall experience.

### 1.1 Why Kathmandu Valley as a research destination?

Kathmandu Valley also known as Nepa Valley is a geographical region of Nepal that includes three districts of Nepal: Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Each district within the Kathmandu Valley comprises central urban areas so intricately interconnected that it coalesces into a cohesive metropolis. The contiguous nature of these districts facilitates a seamless urban fabric, unifying them into an integrated urban entity. This interconnectedness not only blurs the administrative boundaries but also establishes a functional, spatial, and socio-cultural coherence, thereby delineating the Kathmandu Valley as a singular and interconnected urban conglomeration. Despite its limited geographical expanse of just 220 square kilometers, the Kathmandu Valley stands as a repository of cultural and historical significance, boasting the designation of seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2024). These encompass the Durbar Squares situated in the urban centers of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur, serving as ideal example of traditional palace complexes. Additionally, the Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath and Boudhanath, and the Hindu temples of Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan, collectively contribute to the Kathmandu Valley's esteemed cultural heritage. This multitude of recognized heritage sites not only attests to the concentrated wealth of architectural and religious landmarks within the valley but also underscores the region's commitment to the preservation of its diverse cultural legacy.

However, despite the Kathmandu Valley's prominence as a cultural and traditional centre, it has not received the global recognition it deserves in terms of its culinary offerings. The region's unique blend of flavours and culinary traditions remains largely unknown in international culinary discussions. This creates a paradox: while the Kathmandu Valley has significant tourism potential due to its rich cultural heritage, its gastronomic contributions have been overlooked. An academic investigation into this paradox reveals the untapped

potential of the Valley's gastronomy as a resource for attracting tourists. Introducing the region's distinctive culinary offerings to the global stage strategically could establish the Kathmandu Valley as a gastronomic destination, expanding its appeal to tourists. Unveiling its authentic unique foods which has been largely unknown, opens up a promising avenue for tourism development, offering a more enriching experience for global visitors.

## 1.2 Motivation and Problem Formulation

Despite the Kathmandu Valley's global acclaim for its awe-inspiring landscapes, the region remains relatively underexplored in terms of its distinctive cultural and traditional facets, with even less attention directed towards its unique gastronomy. This perceptual gap in tourist awareness, wherein the Kathmandu Valley's gastronomic potential remains largely overlooked, underscores a critical lacuna in the existing scholarly discourse. The scholarly community is yet to comprehensively investigate the multifaceted aspects of the Kathmandu Valley's unique culinary heritage, which not only stands as a testament to the region's rich cultural tapestry but also holds substantial untapped potential as a distinctive tourism attraction. This research motivation is anchored in the imperative to address and contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding the underappreciated gastronomic dimensions of the Kathmandu Valley.

Nepal, being a developing country, is in the process of evolving its culinary practices. Although, Kathmandu Valley is the most developed part of the nation, there are still challenges due to insufficient control over food quality and hygiene in the system. Many local dishes are still prepared and served in a traditional manner, preserving authenticity. While this may appeal to a niche of food enthusiasts, its broader appeal to a diverse tourist audience is yet to be fully understood. Recent research by Khanal et al. (2020) has identified notable bacterial and microorganism levels in well-loved Newari dishes like “Choila” and “Kachila”. The study strongly advises against consuming such foods and emphasizes the adoption of stringent hygiene practices during their preparation. Regular monitoring of food quality is also strongly recommended to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals partaking in these traditional culinary offerings. This research aims to investigate tourists' perspectives on authentic local Newari cuisine in Kathmandu Valley and their concerns regarding food ingredients and hygiene and overall quality of the food without compromising its authenticity. The study seeks to shed light on the potential of traditional Newari culinary offerings to attract a more extensive tourist demographic. The lack of discussion in academic

research emphasizes the need to explore the complex relationship between what tourists expect from genuine culinary experiences and their practical concerns. This forms the basis for defining the research problem in this study.

## 1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

By critically assessing how its gastronomy is currently represented among global tourists and suggesting strategic approaches to introduce its culinary heritage, the study aims:

- to investigate the perceptions of tourists regarding local authentic Newari cuisines and their associated concerns with authenticity and hygiene, specifically focusing on food ingredients, preparation methods, and hygiene practices.
- To investigate the revisit intention in the destination for the local food.

## 1.5 Research Questions

- How do tourists perceive and authentic local Newari cuisine in the Kathmandu Valley, and what are their specific concerns regarding preparation methods, food ingredients and hygiene practices?

## 1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into seven distinct chapters, each serving a specific purpose to comprehensively address the research topic. First chapter provides a foundational overview of the research background, including the rationale for selecting the Kathmandu Valley as the focus of the study. This chapter introduces the research motivation, formulates the problem, and outlines the research aim and objectives. It also presents the research questions, discusses the study's limitations, and identifies the research gap that the thesis aims to address. The second chapter Literature review critically examines existing research related to food authenticity, with a specific focus on hygiene, authenticity, and the preparation and ingredients of food. This chapter situates the current study within the broader context of prior research, highlighting key themes and identifying gaps that the thesis seeks to fill.

Likewise, the third chapter presents the methodological choice of the research, details of research design and data collection strategies employed in the study. It outlines the methodological choices made, explaining how these choices align with the research



objectives and how data was gathered and analysed. Chapter 4 is Analysis and Discussion that presents and interprets the collected data, providing a thorough analysis of the findings. This chapter discusses how the data answers the research questions and relates to the study's objectives, offering insights into tourists' perspectives on authentic Newari food. Furthermore, Chapter 5 synthesizes the key findings from the research and draws conclusions based on the analysis. It summarizes the main insights and discusses their relevance to the research aims and objectives.

Chapter 6 acknowledges Limitations and challenges encountered during the research process. This chapter discusses how these limitations might affect the interpretation or generalizability of the findings. Finally, chapter 7 provides recommendations and provides practical suggestions based on the research findings. It offers recommendations for future research and practical implications for stakeholders, such as restaurateurs, policymakers, and tourism operators, aiming to enhance the authenticity and safety of Newari cuisine for tourists.

## 1.7 Research Gaps

Despite the rich cultural heritage and growing popularity of Newari cuisine among tourists, there remains a significant gap in understanding how tourists perceive the authenticity of Newari food, particularly with respect to their concerns about hygiene, ingredients, and preparation methods. Existing literature primarily focuses on the general appreciation of ethnic cuisines and the cultural significance of food experiences in tourism. However, there is a notable scarcity of research addressing the specific concerns that tourists may have regarding the safety and quality of authentic Newari dishes.

Current studies such as tend to emphasize either the cultural aspects of cuisine or broad issues of food safety in tourism without delving into the nuanced perspectives of tourists. For instance, while some research highlights the impact of food safety practices on tourist satisfaction, there is limited insight into how tourists specifically perceive and react to the hygiene standards, ingredient authenticity, and preparation methods associated with Newari food.

Furthermore, there is a lack of detailed empirical research that combines tourists' expectations of authenticity with their practical concerns about food safety. This gap includes an exploration of how traditional preparation methods are viewed in the context of modern

hygiene standards and how these perceptions influence tourists' dining experiences and overall satisfaction.

Addressing this gap is crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding of how to balance authenticity with food safety in the tourism sector. It will also contribute valuable insights for restaurateurs, policymakers, and tourism operators in developing strategies to enhance the dining experience while maintaining the cultural integrity of Newari cuisine.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Newar Community

The Newars, alternatively spelled Newa or Newār, represent an indigenous ethnic collective with roots deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the Kathmandu Valley and its peripheries in Nepal (Shrestha, 1999). Renowned for their historical significance, the Newar community boasts a cultural heritage steeped in uniqueness, characterized by distinctive traditions and a language peculiar to their heritage known as “*Nepal Bahasa*”. This dialectal manifestation, recognized as a Tibeto-Burman language, encompasses a spectrum of dialectical variations spoken within the community (encyclopaedia, 2024). Such linguistic diversity not only serves as a hallmark of the Newar cultural identity but also reflects the nuanced linguistic intricacies inherent to this ethno-cultural group. Beyond linguistic attributes, the Newars exhibit a profound cultural distinctiveness, epitomized by traditional artistic expressions, musical compositions, dance forms, and a vibrant tapestry of festivals integral to their way of life. These cultural elements collectively contribute to the Newars' unique identity, signifying a repository of intangible heritage that enriches the cultural landscape of the Kathmandu Valley (Tamang, 2016). Further, they are widely acknowledged for its enduring presence, being regarded as the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, an encompassing region that encompasses the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu.

### 2.2 Newari Cuisine

The culinary paradigm of Newari cuisine, distinguished by its nuanced interplay of rich flavours, distinctive ingredients, and profound cultural significance, serves as a compelling subject for scholarly exploration within the expansive domain of culinary tourism. In Newari culture, food serves not only as sustenance for the palate but also as a symbolic manifestation of cultural identity and tradition (Tamang, 2016). It functions as a means of expressing and preserving the rich heritage and values intrinsic to the community. Newari food extends beyond mere sustenance, serving as a cultural symbol in various rites and rituals. Dishes like "Yomari" during the Yomari Punhi festival and "Samay Baji" during Indra Jatra play a crucial role in Newari celebrations (Gautam, 2012). Therefore, the culinary practices within Newari culture, therefore, extend beyond mere gastronomic experiences, embodying a deeper connection to the cultural narrative and traditional ethos of the community. Researchers argue that understanding the cultural symbolism of Newari dishes is essential for appreciating their authenticity and significance. Hence, the authenticity of Newari cuisine emanates from

various features, encompassing the meticulous preparation methods, the presentation of the food, and the intended recipient of the meal. These elements collectively contribute to the genuine and culturally rooted nature of the culinary experience within the Newari tradition.

In terms of hygiene of the Newari food Khanal et al. (2020) reported notable levels of bacteria and microorganisms in popular Newari dishes like “Choila” and “Kachila,” suggesting that these dishes should be avoided due to potential health risks. In contrast, other research indicates that spices used in the preparation of traditional Newari meat dishes, such as “Kachela” (minced buffalo meat), possess antibacterial properties that enhance the shelf life of the meat (Sah, Khanal, & Acharya, 2020). This finding is supported by additional research indicating that herbs and spices possess antibacterial and antifungal properties (Liu et al., 2017; Maharjan et al.; Padhye et al.). However, the limited amount of research conducted on the hygiene factors of Newari cuisine makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Further, limited research exists on how tourists perceive and experience authentic Newari cuisine. However, exploratory studies suggest that there is growing interest among tourists in discovering unique and culturally rich culinary experiences, presenting an opportunity for the promotion of Newari food as a tourism attraction (Bajracharya, 2019).

## 2.3 Authenticity

Authenticity is a complex, socially constructed concept that can be understood from various perspectives. Over the years, it has been evaluated through three primary lenses: objective, constructive, and existential authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999; Brown, 2013). Objective authenticity views authenticity as an inherent quality of objects or experiences. In contrast, constructive authenticity suggests that authenticity is socially constructed, and existential authenticity refers to a personal or intersubjective state experienced by tourists (Wang, 1999). Despite varying definitions, authenticity remains a key factor in shaping tourist experiences. It is seen as a dynamic process emerging from meaningful interactions, driven by both expertise and emotional connection (Moore et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that millennials and Generation Z travelers prioritize authenticity, personal fulfillment, and sustainable practices when exploring new cultures (Sofronov, 2018; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2020). In the post-COVID-19 era, where digital and virtual experiences have become more prevalent, tourists increasingly seek genuine, real-life cultural interactions. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of authentic local food in enhancing positive tourism experiences (Li et al., 2021). However, scholars have also noted that while

tourists are motivated to visit local restaurants and try local food, they have significant concerns about hygiene. Issues such as hygiene in customer-use spaces, personal hygiene of staff, and workplace cleanliness are critical factors influencing tourists' loyalty and overall satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2022). Cohen and Avieli (2004) argued that the practical concerns of tourists regarding the safety and hygiene of local food are often overlooked in the literature on food tourism and authentic local cuisine. In the digital era contemporary tourism, travelers conduct thorough pre-trip research, using internet resources and guidebooks to gather information on food establishments, indigenous culinary offerings, and food safety standards, aligning their preferences with emotional comfort, safety, and convenience (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017). Tourists often engage in thorough research before visiting a destination, carefully evaluating various aspects such as food offerings, service quality, hospitality, and hygiene. In addition to exploring the type of cuisine available, they place significant importance on ratings and reviews that reflect the overall experience, including the establishment's cleanliness, staff behavior, and the quality of service provided. This comprehensive assessment allows tourists to make informed decisions that align with their expectations and preferences, ensuring a satisfying and safe experience during their visit.

## 2.4 Significant of preparation method and ingredient in gyastronomy

Authenticity in Newari cuisine is closely tied to traditional preparation methods and the use of local ingredients (Shrestha, 2018). While the literature emphasizes the importance of these factors in creating an authentic culinary experience, it often fails to critically assess the practical challenges associated with maintaining these traditions. For instance, the sourcing of local ingredients is highlighted as crucial for authenticity (Angelopoulos et al., 2019), but there is limited discussion of the economic and logistical challenges that may arise from this. The higher cost of locally produced food and the potential scarcity of traditional ingredients are significant barriers that are not fully addressed in the literature. Furthermore, while traditional preparation methods are celebrated for their role in preserving culinary authenticity, the literature does not adequately explore how these methods can be adapted to meet modern food safety standards without losing their cultural significance. There is also a lack of critical analysis of how the commercialization of traditional dishes for a global audience may lead to changes in preparation methods, potentially compromising the very authenticity that is being marketed.

## 2.6 Hygiene Perception and Authenticity

The relationship between hygiene and authenticity is complex, often resulting in conflicting evaluations by consumers (Lehman et al., 2014). While the literature acknowledges that consumers may overlook hygiene shortcomings in restaurants perceived as authentic, there is insufficient exploration of the potential long-term consequences of this dynamic. For instance, repeated incidents of foodborne illness or negative health outcomes associated with "authentic" dining experiences could damage the reputation of ethnic cuisines and deter tourists, ultimately undermining the goals of food tourism. Zhang et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of hygiene perception in shaping tourists' loyalty and satisfaction with ethnic food experiences. However, the literature does not critically engage with how these perceptions are formed or the role of cultural biases in influencing tourists' evaluations of hygiene. There is a need for more research on how different cultural contexts shape perceptions of cleanliness and how these perceptions interact with notions of authenticity. Moreover, while the promotion of ethnic food through influencers and targeted events can attract tourists (Ting et al., 2019), the literature does not critically assess the potential drawbacks of this approach. For example, the involvement of influencers in promoting ethnic food experiences may lead to the oversimplification or misrepresentation of complex culinary traditions, ultimately affecting the perceived authenticity of the food. Additionally, the focus on hygiene as a critical factor in ethnic food consumption raises questions about how to balance the need for cleanliness with the desire to maintain traditional food preparation methods that may not align with modern hygiene standards.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The term "research," combining "re" and "search," signifies a systematic and methodical investigation aimed at acquiring new knowledge or insights based on existing information (Pandey and Pandey, 2015). Therefore, Research Methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. When conducting research there are various options available to the researcher and the research journey can take a number of routes determined by the methodological choices of the researcher. However, sometimes the most obvious option is not always the best. According to Saunders et al (2018) *“a major factor in determining the quality of your research proposal is the extent to which you have considered these various options and the clarity of thought which you have displayed in coming to a decision as to which design to adapt”*.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed overview of the methodologies employed in the research, serving as a guide for both the researcher and readers to understand the systematic approaches and rationale behind the chosen methods. The chapter is structured into several sections, each addressing a critical component of the research process. In this study, the researcher has adopted the research onion framework to systematically guide the research methodology. The research onion serves as a route map for this research as outer two layers of the onion contain thinking about research philosophies and approach to theory development the next three inner layers reflect the need to consider methodological choices, research strategies

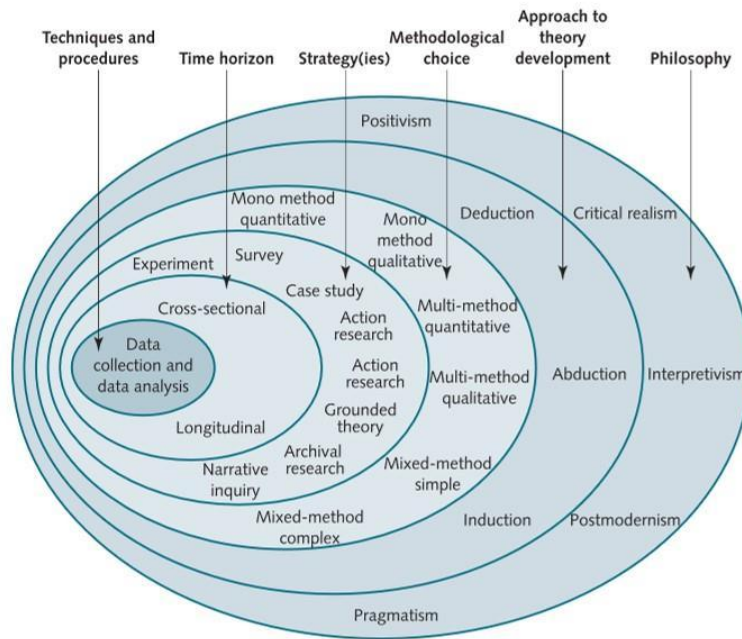


Figure 1: The Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis, Thornholl, 2018)

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

“The term research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development and nature of knowledge” (Saunders, Lewis, Thronhill, 2018). It is the foundational aspect that influence the entire research process, even it is not actively considered at every stage. It shapes several types of assumptions that guide how research is designed, conducted and interpreted. For this research, the researcher is grounding their work in epistemological assumptions and an interpretivist philosophy. This approach implies that the study is based on the belief that knowledge is subjective and constructed through human experiences and interactions. The interpretivist philosophy emphasizes understanding the meanings and contexts behind human behaviour and complex phenomena like tourism.

Given that the research aims to explore tourists' perspectives on the local food of the Kathmandu Valley, adopting an interpretivist epistemological philosophy is particularly appropriate. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the tourists' perspectives, recognizing that these viewpoints are complex and nuanced. The interpretivist philosophy supports the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and participant observations, which enable close human interaction and the uncovering of rich, context-specific insights (Goldkhul, 2012).



Given that the Kathmandu Valley is renowned for its unique cultural and traditional heritage, as well as its distinctive and diverse culinary offerings, a detailed exploration of tourists' perspectives on local food necessitates a specialized approach. The region's cuisine, which ranges from very spicy to very sweet, is largely unfamiliar to the outside world. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of tourists' perceptions requires a research philosophy that can capture the complexity and richness of these experiences.

Adopting an interpretivist epistemological philosophy is particularly suitable for this study. Interpretivism supports the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnographic observations, which facilitate close interaction with participants and allow researchers to uncover nuanced insights into tourists' perspectives. This approach is ideal for studies that demand a detailed and comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena, as it contrasts with positivist philosophy, which might overlook the subjective and intricate nature of human experiences. Furthermore, positivist philosophy typically relies on quantifiable data and objective measurement and is more suitable for quantitative methods like surveys, experiments and structured questionnaires. Moreover, it often relies on statistical analysis and hypothesis testing to derive conclusion. By employing interpretivism, the research can more effectively reveal the layered and context-dependent meanings that tourists ascribe to their culinary experiences in the Kathmandu Valley. This stands in contrast to positivist philosophy, which typically relies on quantifiable data and objective measurement, potentially overlooking the intricate and subjective nature of human experiences and perceptions. This philosophical stance will shape the research design, guiding the selection of qualitative methods such as interviews or case studies, which are suitable for exploring complex, context-dependent insights.

### 3.2 Approach to Theory Development

Now we move to the next layer of the research onion to address our approach to theory development. Theory is broadly defined as an explanation of the relationship between two or more concepts or variables. The role of theory is crucial in any study, as all research projects need to link to theory in some way. The purpose is to provide a framework that guides the research and helps in understanding and explaining the phenomena being studied. There are three major approaches to theory development: deduction, induction, and abduction (Saunders, Lewis and Thronhill, 2018). For this research, abduction is deemed appropriate. As Deduction approach involves testing theoretical propositions. It starts with a general

theory or hypothesis and then collects data to test these predictions. Whereas, Induction is opposite of deduction, induction moves from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. It begins with data collection and then develops a theory based on the observed patterns. However, abduction combines elements of both deduction and induction. Instead of moving strictly from theory to data (deduction) or from data to theory (induction), abduction allows the researcher to move back and forth between theory and data. This approach enables the use of existing theories to uncover new discoveries throughout the research process. It is particularly suitable for complex studies, as it provides flexibility and allows for the refinement of theories based on emerging findings.

### 3.3 Methodological Choice

The research aims to explore tourists' perceptions of authentic local food in the Kathmandu Valley. To achieve this, the study employs a qualitative research methodology, which is well-suited to the interpretivist philosophical approach. Qualitative research methods are invaluable for offering detailed descriptions of complex phenomena, tracking unique events, illuminating diverse actors' experiences and interpretations, giving voice to seldom-heard perspectives, and facilitating initial explorations to develop and test theories and hypotheses. (Sofaer, 1999). Unlike quantitative method it enables the researcher to interpret and analysis the collected data in a flexible way as multiple realities can exist at once.

According to (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2020) “*qualitative research is an approach that allows you to examine people’s experiences in detail by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories and biographies*”. Therefore, qualitative research methodology is well-suited to this study as it facilitates the use of primary data collection methods, including structured interviews and thematic analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of tourists' perceptions of authentic local food in the Kathmandu Valley. Additionally, the qualitative method supports the incorporation of secondary data collection and analysis, such as examining online videos and social media posts. This combination of primary and secondary data sources enriches the research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that shape tourists' views and experiences regarding the authenticity of local cuisine in the region. This approach enables the researcher to collect data through structured interviews, providing a deeper perspective on tourists' views regarding the authentic Newari food of the Kathmandu Valley.

### 3.4 Research Strategy

The selection of an appropriate research strategy is crucial to effectively answering a research question and achieving the research objectives. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thronhill (2018) the specific label given to a research strategy is relatively insignificant; what truly matters is that the chosen strategy effectively addresses the research question(s) and achieves your research objectives. This process involves a thoughtful consideration of the nature of the research question, the objectives to be achieved, and the context within which the research is being conducted.

For this research, a case study approach has been adopted, focusing on Newari cuisine and the Kathmandu Valley as the central subjects of investigation. According to Heale and Twyrvoss (2018) case study is not merely a qualitative approach or limited to the study of a single instance, but rather a research design focused on in-depth analysis that can be generalized to other cases. This research strategy allows for an in-depth exploration of various dimensions of Newari food within its specific geographic and social context. By concentrating on this particular case, the study aims to provide detailed insights into the complexities of authenticity, tourism, and local gastronomy, which may offer broader implications for similar cultural tourism settings.

#### 3.4.1 Primary Data

The primary data for this research was collected through structured interviews with tourists who have visited the Kathmandu Valley and experienced Newari cuisine. The collection of primary data is essential for understanding the complexities of tourism experiences and perceptions of authenticity, as it enables researchers to obtain direct insights from participants, offering a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

##### 3.4.1.1 Structured Interviews

Structured interviews or questionnaires are a widely used qualitative research method designed to gather consistent and comparable data from respondents. Unlike unstructured or semi-structured interviews, structured interviews follow a predetermined set of questions, ensuring that each participant is asked the same questions in the same order (Saunders, Lewis and Thronhill 2018). This method is well-suited for gathering data from a large number of respondents, as it allows for the consistent administration of the same set of questions to all participants. Structured Interviews, in particular, are frequently employed in both descriptive

and explanatory research. Given that this study focuses on tourists' perspectives on local Newari cuisine and their concerns about hygiene, this data collection method is highly compatible with the research design. Data from structured interviews can be collected through various methods, including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, postal surveys, or online platforms. Further, this method enables researchers to collect substantial amounts of data within a short period and is particularly suitable when the researcher is unable to conduct interviews in person. However, unlike semi-structured or unstructured interviews, structured interviews restrict the researcher's ability to probe further into topics or themes, limiting the exploration of in-depth reasoning and often only allowing for a surface-level understanding of the subject matter (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). To address this limitation, secondary data sources, such as YouTube vlogs and comments, can be utilized.

The researcher developed a set of questionnaires specifically designed to address the research questions. These questionnaires were distributed to relevant participants who had recently visited the Kathmandu Valley and experienced Newari cuisine. The questionnaires were created using Google Forms, and the link was sent to the selected participants. The data collected from the responses were subsequently analysed and discussed in Chapter 4, with conclusions and recommendations drawn based on the findings. To ensure data protection, the participants' names have been anonymized, and within the research, they are referred to as "interviewees." Additionally, the researcher tried to select participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, including varying age groups and genders, to ensure diversity in the sample. The overview of the participants is listed below.

Participant	Age	Nationality	Gender	Newari Dish Tried
Interviewee 1	29	Nepali	Male	Yomari
Interviewee 2	31	Australian	Female	Choila
Interviewee 3	28	Nepali living in Denmark	Male	Chhoila, Kachela, Bhutan, sapu mhicha, alutama etc
Interviewee	28	Norway	Female	Wo, Chatamari, Choila

Interviewee	42	Peruvian	Female	Maybe MOMO
Interviewee	37	Nepali living in Denmark	Male	Ayla, Choila, Yomari, Chatamari

### 3.4.2 Secondary Data

In addition to primary data collection methods, secondary data plays a crucial role in enriching and contextualizing the research. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2018) researchers often focus solely on developing their own questionnaires or conducting interviews, thereby overlooking the substantial amount of existing data collected by others, which could be valuable in addressing the research questions. Secondary data refers to information that has already been collected, analyzed, and published by others. It includes a wide range of sources such as academic articles, books, magazine reports, unpublished biography, digital content like YouTube vlogs and online comments etc (Mazhar et. al, 2021). In this study, secondary data is leveraged to complement the primary data, offering additional insights and broader perspectives on the research topic.

The use of secondary data allows for a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine and their concerns regarding hygiene. By analysing existing content, such as Youtube travel vlogs of Newari cuisine and user comments, the research can identify trends, corroborate findings, and explore aspects of the topic that may not have been fully captured through primary data alone.

#### 3.4.2.1 Youtube Vlogs

In the evolving landscape of digital research, YouTube vlogs and their accompanying comments have emerged as valuable sources of secondary data. These platforms offer rich, user-generated content that reflects authentic consumer experiences, opinions, and interactions. In this study, YouTube vlogs and comments are utilized as secondary data to gain deeper insights into tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine and their concerns regarding hygiene.

The choice of YouTube as a data source is informed by the platform's widespread popularity and the diverse range of content it hosts. Vlogs, in particular, provide a dynamic and visual documentation of experiences, often accompanied by narrative commentary, while user comments offer immediate, unfiltered reactions and discussions. Together, these elements

create a robust dataset that captures the nuances of consumer sentiment and behaviour. By integrating these digital sources, the study aims to enrich the analysis and provide a broader context for interpreting primary data findings. To ensure data protection, the vloggers' names will be referred to as "Vlogger" throughout this study.

Vlogger	Channel Name	Published Date	Video Link
1	Luke Martin	Jan 11, 2023  Dec 28, 2022	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EL3ZftNGxZU&amp;t=661s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EL3ZftNGxZU&amp;t=661s</a>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95fnsbFaX4E&amp;t=1048s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95fnsbFaX4E&amp;t=1048s</a>
2	Paris Meets Kathmandu	14 July 2022	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9oABFDjOvQ&amp;t=523s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9oABFDjOvQ&amp;t=523s</a>
3	Best ever Food Review Show		<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdWm9ef-QjM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdWm9ef-QjM</a>

## Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussions

In this chapter we analyse and discuss the data collected in the study, focusing on the key themes that emerged from the primary data - structured interviews and secondary data – YouTube videos and comments. The purpose of this chapter is to explore and interpretate the findings in the context of existing literatures, providing a comprehensive understanding of how tourists perceive Newari cuisine in terms of Authenticity, Hygiene concerns and Revisit Intention. By applying thematic analysis, we aim to uncover the underlying patterns and insights on how tourist perceive Newari cuisine.

The analysis begins by identifying the core themes related to the perception of Newari Cuisine including its perception of authenticity, hygiene concerns and revisit intention. Further, the discussion addresses the potential challenges and limitation in the generalization of the findings, particularly considering the specific cuisine and geographic focus of the study. Through this analysis and discussion, it is aimed to answer the research questions of the study and thus fulfilling the research objective.

### 4.1 Tourist perception of Newari cuisine

This section examines tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine with a focus on its authenticity and hygiene, utilizing data gathered from both primary sources (questionnaires) and secondary sources (YouTube vlogs and comments). The analysis explores how tourists experience and interpret the authenticity of Newari dishes, while also considering their concerns and observations regarding hygiene standards in the local dining environment. By synthesizing insights from direct feedback and online content, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of how Newari cuisine is perceived by visitors, balancing the allure of cultural authenticity with potential worries related to hygiene.

The research findings suggest that tourists have a largely positive view of Newari cuisine. Newari cuisine is perceived as a distinctive culinary experience characterized by a well-balanced and unique taste profile. The dishes are often noted for their rich and complex flavours, which contribute to the overall enjoyment of the food. Additionally, the authenticity of Newari cuisine stands out to tourists, as they appreciate the traditional preparation methods and ingredients that are integral to the local culture. This combination of rich flavours, unique taste, and cultural authenticity makes Newari cuisine highly regarded among visitors.

*“My overall impression of Newari cuisine is that they are one of the most popular food(s) in Nepal. Originated from Kathmandu valley, Newari cuisine is rich in flavour, and showcases a unique culinary tradition. The traditional preparation methods like slow cooking and careful seasoning makes sure that the taste is consistent.” Interviewee 3*

While Newari cuisine offers a rich and diverse array of dishes, some of the more extreme foods, such as "Sapu Mhicha" (bone marrow wrapped in leaf tripe), "Fokso" (goat lungs filled with spices and ingredients), and dishes featuring tongue, may not appeal to all foreign tourists due to their unconventional nature. However, for those who are adventurous and open to trying new flavors, these foods provide an authentic and culturally immersive experience.

*“....the sapu-micha it honestly looks like something out of a sci-fi movie like look at that that's super weird looking and I was more concerned about the lungs because of the way that they look before she cooked them I don't know if they're fresh or whatever but now I'm uh a little bit worried about what this is going to taste like because you can see how plump this thing is it's full of bone marrow....” Vlogger 1*

Despite their exotic appearance, many tourists have expressed that these dishes are surprisingly delicious, underscoring the unique culinary traditions of Newari culture.

*“....wow it's very delicious super super rich I mean the stomach's already really fatty but then a lot of fat comes out of it I mean bone marrow ..... it's so fascinating that they would take the time to use a stomach like a little pocket and I've seen other cultures do that where they'll take something put it in the whole stomach but here they've made little pockets of the different parts of the stomach stuffed it with that bone marrow very intense I like it a lot...” Vlogger 3*

However, some tourists showed hesitation or discomfort when encountering the more exotic elements of Newari cuisine, such as dishes featuring bone marrow or organ meats. These dishes, while integral to the traditional food culture, might be perceived as too unconventional or challenging for those unaccustomed to such ingredients. For them this can be “too authentic”.

*“I especially requested this dish and I'm slightly regretting it another nawari dish that's extremely popular it's called sapumicha it's a buffalo tripe that is filled with bone marrow it's got a really strange look I don't even know how to explain what that looks like it's like a little ball with little bumpy things on the outside and apparently on the inside it's full of bone marrow....” Vlogger 1*



*“....that is uh full of flavor to say the least Actually I don't even know what that flavor is I think they just put salt in it but the bone marrow it's so oily it just explodes..... I can't eat it thank God she's bringing me some alcohol ..... that's gonna definitely help uh clear the flavor of that sapu-micha which has a little bit of a gamey flavor.....” Vlogger 1*

Tourists have shown a marked preference for simpler dishes such as Samay Baji (lunch set with bitten rice, spiced vegetables, seasoned BBQ buffalow meat, pickles etc ), YoMari (Dessert with different fillings inside), Wo (Lentin pancake) and Choila (Seasoned buffalow BBQ ), which are perceived as non-exotic. Feedback from respondents indicates that these foods are not only flavorful and distinctive but also contribute to an authentic cultural experience.

*“ I was glad and perplexed to know that there exist such cuisine with so much variety. After having newari food I felt that Newar cuisine has so much to offer for food explorer.” Interviewee 4*

The integration of Newari cuisine into the tourism experience thus enriches the visit by offering a genuine and culturally significant culinary encounter. The Newari cuisine offers both authentic experience as well as flavourful taste for the tourist of all kinds. Overall, tourists perceive Newari cuisine as both authentic and uniquely flavourful. While some Newari dishes may be considered exotic by certain tourists, others find them highly palatable. For more cautious tourists, there are still a wide variety of Newari dishes that can be enjoyed, catering to different tastes and preferences.

#### 4.2 Tourist perception of Newari food in terms of preparation methods and ingredients:

Regarding the preparation methods, respondents have expressed that the use of traditional cooking methods, such as slow cooking and careful seasoning, is crucial in maintaining the authenticity and quality of Newari cuisine. These techniques, deeply rooted in cultural practices, are essential for achieving the rich, consistent flavors that define the cuisine, emphasizing the importance of preserving these time-honored methods to uphold the culinary heritage of the Newar community.

*“.....dishes are cooked slowly to ensure that the spices blend consistently together. In one of the places, I noticed the use of traditional cooking tools like clay pots and wooden utensils. I*

*think preparation methods play a vital role in preserving the authenticity of Newari food.”*

*Interviewee 3*

Additionally, there is also concern among tourists regarding the use of modern preparation techniques. Some tourists perceive traditional methods, such as firewood cooking, as more authentic, valuing these practices as integral to the cultural authenticity of the experience. For instance, *Interviewee 3* expressed dissatisfaction with the use of modern preparation methods in restaurants, noting that while these techniques may reduce cooking time, they often fail to capture the authentic flavours of traditional Newari cuisine. The preference for traditional methods, such as hand mixing and slow cooking, was strongly emphasized, as these practices are believed to preserve the depth and richness of the dish's original taste. The introduction of modern equipment, although efficient, was seen as compromising the authenticity of the culinary experience. The authentic taste is often referred to as the "local taste," reflecting the perceived flavor of cuisine unique to a specific region.

*“In one of the restaurants I visited, I noticed the use of electric mixer and oven to prepare Newari food. The food preparation time was much quicker but I did not find the taste similar. I would prefer the traditional methods of hand-mixing and slow cooking.....” Interviewee 3*

In contrast, other tourists prefer modern cooking methods and emphasize the importance of standardized cooking procedures and hygiene practices. Concerns are often raised about the condition of cooking utensils, the state of the kitchen, and overall hygiene standards in Newari food establishments, especially in the small local restaurants and eateries.

*“....now we know why people switch to using gas because the smoke is intense you can barely breathe in there it is just billowing out of this kitchen .....I can barely breathe....”*

*Vlogger 1*

Furthermore, while tourists often express a desire for their food to be prepared using traditional methods and to be as authentic as possible, they may later realize that these methods are more complex and, at times, less convenient than they initially anticipated. As noted by *Vlogger 1*, a request was made at a restaurant for the food to be prepared in the traditional manner, which involved the use of firewood. However, the vlogger later regretted this decision, as the smoke from the firewood made it difficult to breathe, prompting a request to switch to gas for cooking.

“.....so we're all dying from the smoke up there and they go why don't we just cook with the gas, then now I was like okay let's just go cook with the gas then so I asked them to do it traditionally before we came here so they thought well I did want to see wood fire but uh now they're just like well...”

This highlights that when tourists refer to authenticity and tradition in gastronomy, they often align their perceptions with constructive or existential authenticity, rather than focusing on object-related authenticity. While tourists often seek traditional preparation methods, these experiences should be designed to be more enjoyable, minimizing disturbances and discomfort. In high-end restaurants, where traditional cooking methods are often modernized, authenticity is typically conveyed rather than fully realized for tourists. The experience provided is often a partial representation of authenticity, primarily through the description of dishes and the creation of an atmosphere that makes tourists feel they are experiencing something genuine.

This perceived authenticity, shaped by the ambiance and presentation, can offer tourists a satisfying and enjoyable sense of cultural immersion, even when the authenticity is curated rather than objective. While objective authenticity might be overwhelming or less accessible to the average tourist, perceived authenticity can effectively deliver a fulfilling experience. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive experience could be achieved if tourists were to explore both types of dining environments—those that offer a firsthand cultural and traditional experience, and those that emphasize hygiene and comfort. This combination could significantly enhance their overall experience by allowing them to appreciate the full spectrum of authentic Newari food.

### 4.3 Tourist perspective on hygiene

Tourists express some concerns regarding the hygiene standards associated with local Newari cuisine, particularly with respect to the ingredients used in non-vegetarian dishes, such as organ meats. Dishes like "Kachhila," which is uncooked minced meat, are viewed with apprehension by visitors. In Nepal, meat is commonly sourced from local butchers, where it often lacks strict quality control and modern slaughter methods. The absence of regulatory oversight and contemporary processing standards exacerbates tourists' concerns about the safety and hygiene of these meat products. Aside from these concerns, tourists generally feel reassured about the hygiene of Newari food. As highlighted by Interviewee 3, the preparation

methods for Newari cuisine are typically slow and involve thorough cooking processes, which minimizes the risk of contamination.

Moreover, respondents noted significant variability in the hygiene standards of restaurants. Smaller, local establishments often appeared to overlook hygiene practices, while higher-end restaurants tended to adhere to international hygiene standards. Nevertheless, even in smaller restaurants, the hospitality is often praised, with service characterized by exceptionally warm and friendly gestures.

*“In a few places where I tried Newari food, I noticed that the cleanliness of the food preparation area and the dining environment varied. For instance, some smaller eateries appeared less clean, which made me a bit uneasy about the overall hygiene practices. Seeing food prepared in such environments raised concerns about the potential for contamination, even though the food itself was delicious.” Interviewee 3*

Furthermore, all respondents emphasized that hygiene is a critical factor in any dining establishment. While the demand for rigorous hygiene standards may be somewhat relaxed in authentic restaurants, there remains an expectation of general cleanliness. This includes maintaining a clean and hygienic dining area and ensuring that the food does not cause illness. Respondents particularly recommended small, well-managed eateries that strike a balance between authenticity and cleanliness. Although tourists seek an authentic experience and value the preservation of traditional preparation methods, a basic standard of hygiene is still expected. This indicates that achieving a balance between authenticity and hygiene is essential to fully realize the potential of Newari cuisine in the tourism industry.

#### 4.4 Revisit Intention

The study reveals a mixed response regarding tourists' intentions to revisit for local Newari cuisine. While some participants expressed a strong willingness to return, particularly for a more authentic experience during festive seasons, others showed less interest in revisiting. The structured interviews, however, did not provide sufficient depth to fully capture the nuanced sentiments of the respondents.

*“..But I learned these foods are presented to guests during festivities and celebrations. Thus I would have loved to consume these cuisines in one such occasion.” Interviewee 4*

In contrast, many vloggers consistently praised Newari food and expressed a clear intention to revisit, with some having already returned specifically to enjoy the cuisine again. This discrepancy suggests that the enthusiasm for Newari cuisine may be more pronounced among certain groups, such as online influencers, compared to the broader tourist population. Further research with more detailed qualitative methods could provide a deeper understanding of these varied perspectives.

“...I could eat Momos for the rest of my life...” Vlogger 1

“...you know that I am probably in the small minority of people who decide to come to Nepal strictly for food....” Vlogger 1

The vlogger emphasizes the authenticity of Newari culture by highlighting that the Newari culture is the original culture of the Kathmandu Valley. He mentions, "a lot of the culture that we associate with Nepal is actually Newari culture," which underscores the cultural authenticity of Newari tradition.

In summary, Newari cuisine possesses significant potential for attracting tourists, as evidenced by the positive feedback from respondents and vloggers. The respondents consistently emphasized the critical importance of maintaining high standards of hygiene, including general cleanliness and sanitation, in establishments serving Newari food. Although some concerns were expressed regarding the ingredients used, these were not considered major issues. Additionally, there was a mixed response regarding the likelihood of revisiting for Newari cuisine, suggesting a promising market for food enthusiasts. However, this potential may be better realized with the adoption of innovative promotional strategies and supportive government policies.

## Chapter 5 Findings and Conclusions

The analysis of tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine has revealed several key findings that contribute to understanding how authenticity, hygiene, and revisit intentions influence their overall experience. These findings are drawn from both primary data (structured interviews) and secondary data (YouTube vlogs and comments), providing a well-rounded perspective.

Tourists generally perceive Newari cuisine as authentic and culturally significant. The traditional preparation methods, unique ingredients, and rich flavors of Newari dishes contribute to this perception. However, the understanding of authenticity varies among tourists, with some associating it with the use of traditional cooking techniques, while others are more concerned with the sensory experience and emotional connection to the food. This duality suggests that authenticity is not a static concept but one that is interpreted differently by each individual, often aligning with either constructive or existential authenticity rather than purely object-related authenticity.

Hygiene is a significant concern for tourists, particularly regarding non-vegetarian dishes and the conditions in which the food is prepared. While many tourists appreciate the traditional aspects of Newari cuisine, such as the use of local ingredients and slow cooking methods, there is also an expectation for basic hygiene standards to be met. The variability in hygiene practices between smaller local eateries and higher-end restaurants was noted, with tourists generally feeling more comfortable in establishments that adhere to international hygiene standards. Despite this, there remains a demand for maintaining a balance between authenticity and hygiene to enhance the overall dining experience.

The study revealed mixed feelings among tourists regarding their intention to revisit for Newari cuisine. While some tourists, particularly those interested in cultural authenticity, expressed a willingness to return, especially during festive seasons, others showed less enthusiasm. This difference in revisit intention might be influenced by the depth of their engagement with the culture and the extent to which they found the food appealing. Interestingly, online influencers, such as vloggers, displayed a higher degree of enthusiasm, frequently praising the food and expressing clear intentions to revisit. This suggests that while Newari cuisine holds a strong appeal for some, its appeal might be more niche, resonating particularly with those who have a deep interest in cultural and culinary exploration.

In conclusion, the potential of Newari cuisine in the tourism industry is significant, but its success depends on addressing the dual demands for authenticity and hygiene, as well as fostering a deeper connection between tourists and the cultural context of the cuisine. This balanced approach will be key to enhancing the culinary experience and encouraging repeat visits, ultimately contributing to the sustainable promotion of Newari cuisine as a unique cultural asset of the Kathmandu Valley.

## Chapter 6 Limitation

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size derived from the structured interviews was relatively small, which may limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions. Additionally, the use of structured interviews—characterized by a standardized set of questions distributed through an online medium—restricted the depth of the conversations. Unlike semi-structured or unstructured interviews, which allow for more exploratory and nuanced discussions, structured interviews limited participants' responses to predetermined options, potentially constraining the richness of the information gathered.

Furthermore, the research focused specifically on a single ethnic group and its cuisine, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or culinary traditions. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of ethnic groups or employing different interview formats could offer more comprehensive insights and enhance the applicability of the results to other settings.

In addition, incorporating the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as restaurant owners, could have provided further insights into the researched topic. Employing alternative methodologies together with interviews, such as participant observation, might also have enriched the study by offering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved. These approaches could have illuminated additional dimensions of the subject matter and enhanced the overall depth and breadth of the research findings.



## Chapter 7 Recommendation and Practical Implementation

This study contributes to the literature on local food and tourism by broadening the concept of authenticity to encompass not only the consumption stage but also the preparation and presentation stages from the tourist perspective. It underscores the significance of authentic ingredients, traditional preparation methods, and rigorous food hygiene practices in shaping consumers' perceptions and behaviours within ethnic food contexts. This study offers valuable insights for restaurant business owners, policymakers, researchers, and tourists. It focuses specifically on tourists' perceptions of Newari cuisine with respect to authenticity and food hygiene. However, the research is limited to this particular stakeholder group. Future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding by incorporating perspectives from additional stakeholders in the Kathmandu Valley, including restaurant owners, local residents, and government officials. Such research would contribute to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, this research does not address the sustainability aspects of local cuisine in the Kathmandu Valley. Future studies could investigate this dimension by assessing how the production, sourcing, and consumption of local foods influence environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Such research could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term viability and ecological impact of local culinary practices. It would also provide valuable insights into how sustainability intersects with authenticity, informing stakeholders who are interested in promoting sustainable tourism and enhancing the overall sustainability of local food systems.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1