



AALBORG UNIVERSITY

MSc in Economics and Business Administration-Marketing & Sales

Master's Thesis

**Navigating Authenticity and Adaptation: Crafting
Value Propositions in Indian Restaurants in
Denmark**

Exploring Cultural Translation and Value Co-Creation in Denmark's Dining
Scene

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Abstract

This study examines how a selected group of Indian restaurants in Denmark navigates the challenge of positioning themselves competitively in the local dining market by balancing culinary heritage with market expectations. Moving beyond a sole focus on customer perceptions, the research highlights the strategic perspectives of restaurant operators- owners, managers, and chefs whose day-to-day decisions shape how Indian cuisine is presented and experienced in a Danish context.

Informed by Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic, the study approaches value as an outcome co-created through interaction. Empirical material was gathered through qualitative, open-ended questionnaires completed by ten industry professionals across Denmark. These first-hand accounts were supported by consultation of the restaurants' digital presence for contextual orientation.

Within this dataset, authenticity emerges not as a fixed attribute but as a negotiated, situational practice. Participants described preserving core culinary traditions while making deliberate adaptations, notably in spice levels and service formats to align with local preferences. The findings point to strategic hybridity as a central approach for managing the tension between heritage and market fit. This process of cultural translation facilitates what participants framed as "safe novelty," allowing diners to explore unfamiliar flavors within a trustworthy setting.

Overall, the study offers context-specific insights into the role of the ethnic restaurateur as a cultural intermediary, whose strategic choices shape meaningful cross-cultural culinary encounters.

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1.Introduction

Food is more than just a meal. It is a story, a point of connection, and a way for cultures to meet and understand one another. Denmark as a country is known for its open-mindedness and high-quality gastronomy. This cultural exchange threads through everyday life. As cities grow more diverse, so do dining options. Finding a new flavor is like finding a welcoming home. Indian cuisine has been one of the clear success stories in this shift. What began as a foreign novelty has gradually earned a place as a favorite for many Danes. This success did not happen by accident. Behind the scenes, Indian restaurant owners are constantly shaping their businesses, working to honor the heart of their heritage while speaking to the tastes of their local customers.

The numbers show a strong and growing market. Dining out and ordering food is deeply embedded in Danish life. The contributing number is 10 billions of kroner to the economy each year, with thousands of businesses operating across the country (Linker Report, n.d.; World IBIS, n.d.). Within this bustling scene, Indian food has shaped up as meaningful space in the industry. Recent surveys suggest there are close to a hundred Indian restaurants in Denmark, most clustered in Copenhagen, pointing to steady sector growth (Digital Rentech, n.d.). This expansion signals a rising Danish willingness to explore these flavors. At the same time, how people eat is shifting. Digital platforms bring food from any restaurant to your door, while greater awareness of sustainability and ingredient provenance reshapes what customers expect (Restaurant Industry in Denmark - Statistics & Facts, n.d.). In this climate, a restaurant appeals hinges on three things- the culinary product itself, the values and narrative wrapped around it, and the ease of access.

For an Indian restaurant owner, this environment demands a distinctive kind of balancing act. It is a daily negotiation between authenticity and adaptation. There is a deep-seated pride in presenting food that feels true to tradition, to family recipes, to India's vast regional diversity. Yet commercial viability here often calls for pragmatic adjustments like moderating spice levels, perhaps, or curating a menu that balances novelty with familiarity (Maksan, 2018). This intentional process of defining and articulating a business's core offering is the craft of the value

proposition. Simply put, it tries to answer the customer's fundamental question: Why choose this restaurant?

Despite the visible success of Indian dining in Denmark, academic research has largely bypassed the entrepreneurs themselves. Existing studies tend to focus on the consumer's experience, examining perceptions of authenticity or dining satisfaction (Lu, 2012; Maegaard et al., 2016). This consumer-centric view is valuable, but it leaves a critical gap which is we hear how authenticity is judged by diners, but not how it is built by owners. We know a lot about the evaluation of the experience, but very little about its design. What's missing is a clear view of how operators actively construct their value propositions under real cultural and market constraints- where culinary heritage, customer familiarity, and commercial survival must be weighed together. The study gives us limited insight into the practical choices such as how restaurateurs decide which elements of authenticity are non-negotiable, where adaptation is necessary, and how these decisions shape everything from menu design and spice calibration to pricing, service style, and digital storytelling. Without examining these foundational entrepreneurial choices, our understanding of the ethnic restaurant business remains partial. We see the performance, but not the strategy behind it.

Theoretical perspectives help us reframe from this search. If we see restaurants as theatrical spaces where culture is deliberately performed, then authenticity isn't a fixed quality. Rather, it's a socially negotiated judgment, co-created with customers (Chatzopoulou, 2025b; Wood, 2021). This shifts the restaurateur's role from a passive guardian of tradition to an active strategic negotiator. My research is structured by this framework- crafting the value proposition is the foundational choice of what kind of authenticity to emphasize; communicating is the performative act of staging that identity; and competing successfully depends on facilitating a co-created, authentic experience in the service encounter.

This leads to my core research question: How do Indian restaurants in Denmark craft and communicate their value propositions to compete in the Danish dining market? To answer it, I pursue three interrelated objectives: to identify the key elements (menu, service, ambience, pricing, branding) that constitute their value proposition; to analyze how they balance cultural

authenticity with adaptation to Danish preferences; and to understand how operators interpret and respond to perceived Danish consumer preferences and what shapes their dining choices.

In essence, an Indian restaurant in Denmark operates as a space of creative translation and hybridity (Iyer, 2025). Reading deeply the narratives of those navigating this terrain, this research seeks insight into how cultural connections are forged through food and how entrepreneurial ventures adapt in a new market. The findings suggest that competitiveness comes not from a static cultural product, but from an ongoing process of strategic choice- blending Indian and Danish elements, communicating that blend through curated aesthetic and narrative cues, and competing through a service encounter that invites customer participation and builds trust. Ultimately, the entire operation reveals itself as a continuous, deliberate exercise in cultural negotiation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept and Pillars of the Value Proposition

The value proposition is one of the most foundational, yet fluid, concepts in contemporary business literature. It is often described as the reason a customer should choose one offering over another. It may be considered a compelling promise of benefits. However, the academic understanding of what this promise is, who makes it, and how it is realized has evolved dramatically. This evolution is not merely a shift in terminology, but a fundamental rethinking of where value originates and how it is brought to life.

The earliest and the most intuitive perspective placed the firm at the center of the value proposition. From this firm-centric view, the value proposition was a strategic artifact. It is a component of a business model (Zott et al., 2011), a carefully crafted narrative designed to persuade (Payne & Frow, 2017). Another author (Ballantyne et al., 2008) quoted value proposition as a promise built upon the firm's unique configuration of resources. Beside him, (Priem, 2007), also wrote on a paper that value was seen as something produced by the firm,

embedded in the product or service, and delivered to the customer. The firm's primary task was to design this valuable offering and capture revenue by convincing customers of its worth. In this view, the customer was a relatively passive recipient, and value was a transferable commodity.

However, this perspective was complicated by a decisive turn toward the customer's experience. Scholars like (Zeithaml, 1988) began to argue that in consumer behavior and marketing, value is not inherent in an offering but is instead determined by the customer's perception. Author (Smith & Colgate, 2007) argues that a value proposition, therefore, is not what the firm claims, but what the customer believes they receive. According to (Smith & Colgate, 2007) it is a calculation of functional, emotional, and social benefits. This customer-centric view shifts the focus of control- the firm promise is held accountable to the customer's subjective judgment. A successful value proposition, from this angle, is one that accurately mirrors or shapes these perceived benefits.

The most integrative and compelling framework for understanding value in service-intensive contexts, such as dining, emerges from Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic. This perspective synthesizes the previous two authors by proposing that value is not created for or perceived by the customer but is co-created with the customer through interaction (Lusch & Vargo, 2014; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The value proposition is thus recast as an invitation to a dialogue which is a hypothesis of potential value that is only validated and realized during the consumption experience. This reframing leads scholars like (Payne & Frow, 2017) to describe the value proposition as simultaneously strategic (involving internal resource choices), communicative (requiring articulation and framing), and relational (dependent on interactive processes). This tripartite nature moves us beyond a static definition to a dynamic process.

This process is usefully operationalized through the interdependent three pillars of value: Creation, Delivery, and Capture (Foss & Saebi, 2017).

By (Payne & Frow, 2017), value creation is the genesis of the value hypothesis. It involves the strategic configuration of resources to generate a differential benefit. In S-D Logic, this creation process is inherently designed for co-creation.

To describe value delivery (Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021) refers to it as a critical bridge between promise and experience. It encompasses all the mechanisms, processes, and interactions, especially communication. This proposed value is made accessible and realized in use.

(Chesbrough & Lettl, 2018) stated that value capture is the outcome, where the firm secures a portion of the value generated through the exchange, typically as revenue and profit. According to the author of this paper, the effectiveness of value capture is wholly dependent on the successful alignment of the first two pillars.

The journey from the firm's strategic creation, through interactive delivery, to final capture provides the perfect scenario for analyzing how businesses, particularly ethnic restaurants, navigate their markets.

2.2 The Ethnic Restaurant as a Negotiated Cultural Stage

A restaurant is more than a place to eat. It is a place where culture is shared and business meets traditions. This statement is so true for an ethnic restaurant. It runs as a cultural storyteller and a theatrical space, where a curated experience is staged through cuisine, decor, and service ritual (Song & Kim, 2022; Wood, 2021). This performative act means the establishment offers a dual-layered promise: functional, gustatory value alongside profound symbolic value rooted in cultural exploration and identity.

The core of this symbolic value is authenticity. Contemporary scholarship understands authenticity not as a fixed, objective property but as a socially constructed and negotiated judgment that emerges from the interaction between the provider and the consumer (Chatzopoulou, 2025a). This judgment varies dramatically based on the customer's frame of reference. For example, a diaspora patron may draw on granular culinary knowledge, while a cultural tourist relies on broader sensory and narrative cues as proxies for the "real" (Bryce & Murdy, 2017). Consequently, authenticity is not delivered but is co-produced, making the restaurant's "realness" continuous negotiation.

This reconceptualization fundamentally transforms the restaurateur's role from a passive guardian of tradition into an active strategic negotiator. They must make deliberate choices about which dimension of authenticity such as heritage, fusion, or a pragmatic hybrid to emphasize. This strategic choice sits at the heart of their value creation and exists in a state of perpetual tension with the commercial imperative to adapt for broader market appeal (Jong-Hyeong Kim, 2017).

This tension is acutely present in a market like Denmark. Much research indicates Danish consumers exhibit a preference for "safe novelty" which means seeking new experiences within familiar and comfortable parameters (Maksan, 2018). For an Indian restaurant, this market disposition makes the creation of a strategic hybrid meaning a form of necessary cultural translation to a central commercial imperative (Iyer, 2025). Every operational decision becomes part of negotiating the balance between excitingly foreign and comfortingly familiar.

This theoretical perspective provides a direct framework for research question. It exhibits that the process of crafting a value proposition is the owner's foundational act of strategic negotiation between authenticity and adaptation. Communicating this value is the performative work of staging the chosen identity. Finally, competing successfully depends on the service encounter, where staff facilitate the co-creation of an authentic experience, determining whether the proposed value is captured. Thus, the entire operation is an ongoing exercise in strategic cultural negotiation.

2.3 Why the Value Proposition Matters for Ethnic Restaurants

While the value proposition framework helps us understand business strategy in general, it takes on a deeper, more urgent relevance when we step into the world of ethnic dining. Here, restaurants are more than just businesses. They are like making stages where culture is performed and translated (Wood, 2021). Every dish, every decor choice, every interaction carries the weight of heritage and the pressure of the market. In this light, the three pillars of value become more than theoretical concepts. They actually mirror the real, daily dilemmas of the ethnic restaurateur: how do you create a menu that feels true to tradition yet welcoming new palates? How do you deliver and explain the soul of a cuisine to someone experiencing it for the

first time? And how do you capture value not just through sales, but through trust, loyalty, and shared understanding?

This is where authenticity shifts from a fixed label to something co-created in the space between the kitchen and the customer (Chatzopoulou, 2025a) . It becomes a strategic choice that shapes the entire dining experience. By applying the value proposition lens to these restaurants, we gain a structured way to explore how cultural meaning is crafted, communicated, and ultimately validated- not in a textbook, but in the vibrant, sometimes messy reality of cross-cultural hospitality.

My research is built on a straightforward but layered question, “How do Indian restaurants in Denmark craft, communicate, and compete through their value proposition?” To untangle this, the value proposition framework I have outlined with its three pillars- creation, delivery, and capture, and its emphasis on co-creation. This is not just a helpful background. But it’s the actual blueprint. It gives me the structure to break down what might otherwise seem like a messy, real-world challenge into something I can study systematically.

I have used three verbs in my research question- “Craft, Communicate, and Compete”. These connect directly with the three phases of the value journey I have drawn from the literature. Crafting is the act of value creation which is the strategic choices made in the kitchen and the business plan. Communicating is the heart of value delivery which is the way the restaurant’s story is told through its menu, its decor, its online presence. And competing is the ultimate test. It is rooted in whether value is successfully captured, which depends entirely on whether the delivery fosters positive co-creation with customers. By using this framework, I’m not just describing what these restaurants do; I’m analyzing how their strategy, storytelling, and customer interaction fit together as one coherent system for survival and growth in a new cultural setting.

2.3.1 Crafting the Value Proposition: The Act of Value Creation

The “crafting” dimension is fundamentally about strategic Value Creation. It asks how restaurateurs configure their unique resources such as culinary skills, cultural knowledge, ingredients, and ambiance. For an Indian restaurant in Denmark, this is not a straightforward

task. It is defined by the central strategic tension in ethnic entrepreneurship which is authenticity-adaptation equilibrium (Gibson, 2007). The restaurateur must decide where to position their offering on a spectrum between uncompromised cultural tradition and pragmatic adaptation to local Danish tastes. This decision basically dictates menu development, sourcing, and staffing. Also, it is the very essence of crafting the value proposition. It is the internal, strategic work of creating a hypothesis of value that they believe will resonate in a cross-cultural market.

2.3.2 Communicating the Value Proposition: The Practice of Value Delivery

A brilliantly crafted value proposition is inert if it is not understood. The “Communication” dimension engages directly with value delivery, specifically its communicative aspect. According to (Croitoru, 2024), In an experiential service, the value proposition is a multidimensional promise of functional, emotional, and epistemic value. Communication is the narrative frame that makes this intangible promise tangible. For an Indian restaurant, this goes far beyond a menu. It involves the holistic curation of a sensory and narrative environment through decor, music, aroma, service, and digital storytelling. It guides the customer’s interpretation and shapes their expectations before and during the meal (Temel & Şimşek, 2025; Youn, 2024). Effective communication ensures the market understands and is drawn to the unique proposition.

2.3.3 Competing via the Value Proposition: The Outcome of Value Co-Creation and Capture

Finally, “competing” is a market test. This dimension connects to the realization of value-in-use and the success of value capture. According to S-D Logic (Lusch & Vargo, 2014), the proposed value is merely potential. The real value is determined during consumption through active co-creation between the customer and the service provider (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). For an Indian restaurant, competitive success depends on its ability to design its value delivery mechanisms (especially service interactions) to facilitate successful co-creation with a culturally unfamiliar audience. (Priem, 2007) mentioned that if this interactive delivery fails, the customer’s perceived value plummets, hindering loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and profitability which are the very

essence of value capture. Therefore, competition is reframed from comparing static menus to evaluating which restaurant can most reliably orchestrate positive, value-realizing experiences.

In sum, the value proposition framework allows us to see the research question not as three separate tasks, but as a connected narrative- restaurateurs create a strategic cultural offering, deliver it through an immersive narrative, and compete by enabling the co-creation that allows them to capture sustainable value. This is the story my research explored.

2.4 Strategic Hybridity in Ethnic Dining

The literature on value propositions, authenticity, and ethnic entrepreneurship points toward a shared insight and that is operating an ethnic restaurant in a foreign market involves continuous cultural and commercial negotiation rather than the simple “transfer” of a cuisine into a new setting. From a Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic perspective, value is not embedded in the offering itself. But it is realized in use through interaction, meaning that cultural meaning and economic outcomes emerge in the service encounter rather than being fully controlled by the firm (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). This positions the ethnic restaurateur not merely as a guardian of tradition but as an active mediator who must translate cultural heritage into an experience that a local market can interpret, trust, and adopt. This translation begins with strategic choices tied to value creation. In business model terms, value creation involves configuring resources such as products, capabilities, and practices. Together, these create an offering that can generate value in each context (Foss & Saebi, 2017). In ethnic dining, these choices are shaped by a central tension identified in entrepreneurship scholarship. The tension is the pressure to preserve cultural integrity while adapting to local expectations for commercial viability (Gibson, 2007). In practical life, this demands owners and managers to decide which dimensions of authenticity are maintained as core and which can be adjusted without undermining the restaurant’s identity. Such decisions influence menu design, sourcing, and the overall service concept, and function as a strategic hypothesis about what the market will perceive as both credible and appealing. However, a strategic approach must also be made intelligible to customers. Value delivery therefore becomes inseparable from communication, not only through marketing messages but through the staged and performed elements of the restaurant environment. Scholars of experiential consumption and hospitality describe restaurants as cultural stages where ambience,

ritual, and narrative cues shape interpretation and expectation (Wood, 2021). In this view, communication extends beyond the menu to include decor, staff conduct, music, visual identity, and digital presence. All of these contribute to framing what the experience means (Temel & Şimşek, 2025). This aligns with the view that value delivery is not simply about distribution but about enabling customers to access and interpret the proposed value in context (Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021). Yet the literature is clear that the proposed value remains in potential until it is validated in interaction. Competitive success is therefore best understood through value co-creation and capture- customers actively participate in evaluating, accepting, or contesting the authenticity of claims and the overall experience during consumption (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Because authenticity is widely treated as socially negotiated rather than objectively fixed. The service encounter becomes the key arena where legitimacy is confirmed or weakened (Chatzopoulou, 2025a). When the encounter produces trust and perceived fit, it supports loyalty and positive reputation, which in turn enables value capture in sustainable terms (Chesbrough & Lettl, 2018).

Altogether, these perspectives suggest that ethnic restaurants sustain competitiveness through an ongoing process of cultural translation across three interlinked strategic tasks- configuring the offering (value creation), staging and signaling identity (value delivery), and enabling customer validation in use (value co-creation and capture). This dynamic can be understood as a strategic hybrid. This is not a one-time fusion of elements, but a continual balancing of heritage and adaptation in response to market interaction and changing expectations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Philosophy of Science

A research philosophy is a foundational set of beliefs that guide a study. It explains how the researcher views the nature of reality and the creation of knowledge (SAUNDERS et al., n.d.) . This philosophy is not merely abstract. It is a practical guide that shapes every decision in the

research process, from the initial question to the final analysis (Bell et al., n.d.). Articulating this stance is therefore essential for creating a coherent and credible methodological framework.

This study is grounded in interpretive philosophy. It is also known as constructivism.

Interpretivism refers to that social reality is not a single, objective truth. Instead, it has multiple realities that are constructed by individuals through their lived experiences, social interactions, and shared meanings (Bryman, 2016; Schwart & Yanow, 2012). This perspective explains that what we know about the world is always filtered through human perception and interpretation.

This philosophical choice is made by the specific nature of my research question. The question “How do Indian restaurants in Denmark craft and communicate their value propositions to compete?” seeks to understand complex social processes. The core concepts in this inquiry are the value proposition, authenticity, and cultural adaptation. These concepts are not objective facts that can be simply measured. As established in the literature review, they are fluid social constructs. A restaurant’s value is defined through a dynamic exchange between owner and customer. Authenticity is a feeling negotiated during a meal, not a fixed label (Chatzopoulou, 2025a; Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

Therefore, the goal of this research is not to test a pre-existing theory with numbers. The goal is to achieve a deep, contextual understanding of how the participants themselves perceive their world. It aims to interpret the subjective meanings, strategies, and challenges from the viewpoint of the Indian restaurants (Holloway & Todres, 2003). This is an exploration of their lived reality.

Consequently, an interpretivist philosophy is not just suitable but necessary. It validates the pursuit of rich, personal perspectives and logically leads to a qualitative methodology. This framework is essential for answering the “how” and “why” questions at the heart of this study. It prioritizes the participants' own voices and interpretations. To capture these subjective meanings, this study employs a self-administered, open-ended qualitative questionnaire. This method is specifically designed to draw out the detailed, narrative data required. This also allows participants to reflect and provide nuanced accounts in their own words.

3.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Stance

This interpretivist approach is defined by two interrelated philosophical commitments:

Ontology: Social Constructionism

This study operates from the core ontological assumption that reality, particularly within socio-commercial contexts like ethnic dining, is not objective or fixed. Instead, realities are socially constructed through ongoing processes of language use, shared meaning-making, and cultural interaction (Berger & Luckmann, n.d.). Consequently, the value proposition of an Indian restaurant in Denmark is not merely a list of menu items or prices. It is a fluid, negotiated construct. Basically, it is a set of meanings shaped by the restaurant owner's strategic narrative and the customer's experiential interpretation. Understanding its crafting, requires accessing the subjective worldviews of owners regarding concepts like "authenticity", "adaptation", and "value" in the Danish market (Burrell & Morgan, n.d.).

Epistemology: Subjectivism

Flowing directly from this ontology, the study's epistemology is subjectivist. It states that knowledge is not discovered "out there" but is generated through the researcher's interpretive engagement with the interpretations of the participants (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). The research objective is thus to achieve *verstehen*- a deep, empathetic understanding of the processes of crafting and communicating value, rather than to establish generalizable causal laws (Creswell & Poth, n.d.). This epistemological position validates the choice of qualitative methods, as it prioritizes rich, contextual insight into experiential and cultural nuances over quantitative measurement.

Together, this shows that value is socially constructed (ontology) and known through interpretive engagement (epistemology). It provides the definitive rationale for the qualitative methodology that follows. It clarifies that the study aims to interpret the meaning of the value proposition from the inside by exploring how it is lived and negotiated by the actors themselves.

3.2 Research Approach:

Given the scarcity of existing research on the strategic choices of Indian owners in Denmark, this study needed an approach that could get at the how and why behind their decisions. A standard survey that just counts opinions wouldn't extract the information. I wasn't actually looking for numbers, rather I was looking for meanings. This led me to an interpretive, qualitative, and exploratory approach. The core idea here is that business realities like "authenticity" or "value" aren't fixed facts you can just measure. They're shaped by daily practice, conversation, and negotiation. My role was to understand how the people running these restaurants make sense of that negotiation in their own context.

To capture that, I needed their stories in their own words. Recognizing the hectic schedules in the hospitality industry, I chose self-administered, open-ended questionnaires. This lets owners, managers, chefs, and service employees respond thoughtfully in their own time. It helped me to get reflective narratives rather than rushed soundbites. The questions provided a consistent focus on menu design, adaptation, branding etc. But the questionnaire also left plenty of room for them to explain their reasoning in the way that made sense to them.

Making sense of those narratives was the next step. My analysis wasn't about imposing a pre-set theory onto what they said, nor was it about ignoring the useful ideas from the literature. Instead, I worked in a back-and-forth, theory-informed way. The concepts from the literature review such as value co-creation or the restaurant as a cultural stage acted as a useful lens. These helped notice certain things in the data. But the themes themselves grew from the ground up, from reading and re-reading what participants actually emphasized. It was a constant conversation: What is this person telling me? How does it connect to or challenge what I've read? This iterative process is how I arrived at the core idea of strategic hybridity. This is a concept that emerged directly from their descriptions of balancing tradition and change.

The specific method for this interpretation was reflexive thematic analysis. This means I acknowledge that the themes I developed are my interpretation of patterns in their accounts, not some objective truth I simply uncovered. It's a systematic but flexible way to build an understanding of complex, personal data. To add another layer to this understanding, I also looked at the restaurants' websites, menus, and selected online reviews. This wasn't for hard

validation, but to quietly check: Does what they say they do line up with how they present themselves publicly? How do customers talk about the experience? This helped situate their personal strategies within the broader public conversation about their food.

In short, the approach moves from a philosophical stance (interpretivism) to a practical method (narrative questionnaires), to an analytical practice (iterative, thematic interpretation). These all aimed at building a credible, grounded understanding of a strategic world that hasn't been mapped in much detail before.

3.3 Data Collection

To address the exploration and interpretive nature of the research question I have employed a qualitative data collection strategy. This approach facilitates the generation of rich, contextually embedded insights into how value propositions are crafted and communicated within a specific cultural and market setting (Creswell & Poth, n.d.). To develop a robust, multi-faceted understanding, data were gathered from two complementary sources.

Primary data were collected using a self-administered, semi-structured questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. This instrument provided a flexible yet consistent framework for participants to articulate detailed narrative of their strategic reasoning and experiences.

Secondary data were obtained through a systematic documentary analysis of relevant digital content. This analysis provided a tangible context for how value propositions are publicly communicated and externally perceived.

This secondary material did not form part of the formal dataset for thematic analysis. Instead, it served as a contextual reference point to situate the study and to support the interpretation of operator accounts.

3.3.1 Primary Data: Self-Administered Questionnaires

Sampling Strategy

This study used a targeted, purposive sampling method to find participants. The goal was to identify restaurant owners, managers, and service employees who had direct and relevant experience and could share detailed insights (Patton, n.d.). I aimed to include a diverse mix of viewpoints from the Indian restaurant community in Denmark. Participants were chosen based on three criteria: their job role (e.g., owner, chef, manager), restaurant location (focusing on major areas like Copenhagen, Aarhus, and Aalborg), and restaurant type (from high-end to casual takeaway).

While 48 potential participants were initially identified, the final study group comprised 10 respondents who provided the depth of insight required for this analysis. This 20.83% response rate reflects the practical challenges of engaging busy professionals in a demanding industry, yet it remains consistent with qualitative standards that prioritize the "richness" of data over sheer volume (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I deliberately sought a diverse cross-section of the industry to ensure the findings were not limited to a single perspective. As a result, the sample spans the entire service chain from the strategic vision of owners and managers (P1, P2, P7, P9) to the essential and front-line observations of chefs and service staff (P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10). This variety was crucial to capturing how value is created in the kitchen and subsequently delivered on the floor.

It is important to note that non-participation was largely due to the intense time pressures restaurateurs face, or a self-reported hesitation to translate complex business strategies into a written format. I acknowledge this self-selection as a limitation, as the data naturally leans toward those who had the capacity and comfort to reflect deeply on their professional practice.

Participant Overview

Table 1: Participant Overview

Participant ID	Restaurant	Role	Years of Experience
P1	Bollywood Restaurant and Takeaway	Owner	7+ years
P2	Tandoori Masala, Copenhagen	Owner & Managing Director	15+ years
P3	The Indian Grill	Chef	2 years
P4	Madskolen SIB	Kitchen Assistant	2 years
P5	Aroma Restaurant	Kitchen Assistant / Student	Part-time while studying
P6	Bollywood Restaurant & Take Away	Kitchen Assistant	Not specified
P7	Aalborg Streetfood - Indisk Kitchen	Assistant Manager	1.5 years
P8	Namaste Esbjerg	Assistant Manager	8 months
P9	Chaacha - South Asian Kitchen & Cocktail Bar	Manager	2 years
P10	Dinehut Indian restaurant	Waiter/Waitress	Not specified

Ensuring Richness in Questionnaire Responses

Acknowledging that open-ended questionnaires can sometimes yield brief responses. For that reason, several design and procedural steps were implemented to encourage depth and substantive narrative data. The questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions followed by specific prompts to elicit concrete, situational examples rather than general statements. For instance, prompts included: “What differentiates your restaurant in the Danish dining market?” and “Can you think of a situation where staying authentic conflicted with customer expectations? How did you handle that?”

Participants were given clear instructions in the introduction to provide detailed answers in paragraph form, using examples from their daily operations. They were assured that the value of their response lay in the depth of their reflection.

To further ensure depth, a limited, respectful follow-up was conducted via email for two participants whose initial submissions were notably brief. A single, targeted question was posed, asking for elaboration on a specific point they had mentioned. For the two responses collected offline with assistant mediation, the assistant was trained to use the same prompting language from the written questionnaire to ensure consistency in eliciting detailed, example-rich accounts across all participants.

Questionnaire Design: Rationale for a Self-Administered Qualitative Instrument

While in-depth interviews were initially considered, I ultimately chose a self-administered, open-ended qualitative questionnaire as the primary instrument. This was a strategic decision rooted in both the practicalities of the restaurant industry and the epistemological goals of the study.

First, acknowledging the demanding and often irregular schedules of hospitality professionals, this asynchronous format respected the participants' time, allowing them to engage with the research without the pressure of a synchronous interview. This approach also facilitated a broader geographic reach, ensuring voices from Copenhagen to Aalborg were included. Second, I found that providing participants the space to respond in private encouraged a level of reflective depth that real-time conversation sometimes lacks. Finally, the questionnaire was designed to offer "structured flexibility"; while organized around core theoretical themes, the

open-ended nature of the prompts gave participants the agency to express their perspectives in their own words. Rather than a compromise, this methodological choice was an intentional effort to generate rich, reflective data that honors the lived experience of the restaurateurs while maintaining a consistent interpretive framework.

Questionnaire Protocol and Procedure

The main information was gathered using a written questionnaire with open-ended questions, allowing participants to answer in their own words. The questions were based on key ideas from the research theory, which helped keep the answers focused but still gave people the freedom to explain their thoughts and experiences fully.

Procedure

Recruitment: Participants were recruited through a call for volunteers posted on social media channels. Interested individuals were then contacted directly. They received an email explaining the academic purpose of the study and assuring them of full anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Collection: The questionnaires were administered in December 2025. To make it convenient for participants in different locations, the questionnaire was primarily distributed online using a Google Form. In two cases, to ensure inclusivity, the questions were presented in person with the help of an assistant who wrote down the answers and conveyed me in a word document.

Ethical Considerations: All participants gave their informed consent before starting. They were clearly informed of their right to stop at any time, to skip any question, and that their information would be kept completely anonymous in the final report.

Data Management: With permission, all responses were compiled and organized into a structured digital spreadsheet to prepare the data for analysis.

3.3.2 Secondary Data: Contextual Collection from Public Digital Content

Public digital material was consulted to support contextual understanding of the participating restaurants and the broader Danish dining environment. This included restaurant websites/menus and a small number of publicly available customer reviews. The purpose of reviewing this material was to get myself familiar with how these restaurants present themselves online and the types of issues customers commonly mention, thereby supporting interpretation of the primary questionnaire accounts.

Importantly, this material was not included in the formal analytic dataset and was not coded or thematically analyzed. No claims in the Findings chapter are derived from systematic analysis of reviews or websites. Where relevant, such material is used only as background description or illustrative context, rather than as evidence for the study's themes.

Scope, Sources, and Selection Criteria

The collection was focused and systematic, bounded to the participating restaurants:

1. Official Websites and Digital Menus: To examine the restaurants' curated self-presentation and narrative framing.
2. Customer Reviews on Google Reviews, Food Delivery Platforms: To gain insight into public perception and common themes in customer discourse.

A transparent protocol was followed for the review of data to ensure consistency. I only journaled those reviews published between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2025 time frame. I kept only text-based reviews that are in Danish or English. For each of the nine restaurants with a review presence, the top most recent qualifying reviews within the timeframe were collected.

Inclusion/Exclusion: The analysis focused on reviews containing substantive narrative related to the dining experience (e.g., food, service, ambience, value). Star ratings without text, reviews focused solely on delivery platform errors, spam, and duplicates were excluded.

This structured yet contextual use of secondary material supported the interpretive process by illuminating the public-facing dimension of the value propositions discussed by participants.

4. Data Analysis

This chapter presents the systematic analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected for this study. Following data collection in December 2025, responses gathered through online (Google Forms) and two in-person sessions with assistant-mediated transcription were prepared for thematic analysis

The analysis employs Braun and Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis. This method was selected for its capacity to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data. This approach moves beyond mere description to develop rich, nuanced insights into how Indian restaurants in Denmark construct value propositions, negotiate authenticity, and strategically position themselves within a competitive cross-cultural market.

The thematic analysis is based exclusively on the ten questionnaire responses; public digital material was consulted for contextual orientation and is not treated as analyzed data.

4.1 Data Preparation and Management

After collecting all responses, I compiled and organized the data carefully. To support a clear and consistent analysis, I transferred the responses into a structured Excel spreadsheet.

In this spreadsheet, each row represented one participant, and each column corresponded to a self-administered, open-ended question. This layout made it easy to view and compare answers across participants.

The organized format supported my interpretive approach. It allowed me to code the data methodically, compare responses line by line, and observe strategic differences- for instance, between fine-dining restaurants and those focused on takeaway.

Throughout this process, I stayed close to the participants' original words and contexts. This ensured that broader patterns did not overshadow the unique perspectives and situated realities of each restaurant owner.

4.2 The Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

4.2.1 Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data

I began by thoroughly reading all ten written responses and reviewing the assistant's notes. To capture my early impressions, I kept a research journal during this process. My initial observations included how participants consistently linked "spice adjustment" to "building trust," and how they described "authenticity" not as a fixed standard, but as a flexible, situational practice.

4.2.2 Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

The next step involved open coding the data systematically. Using the Excel matrix as a guide, I read the responses line by line, breaking them into meaningful units. I then tagged each unit with a concise label that captured its essence. For example, references to family recipes were labeled Heritage Connection, and discussions about adjusting for local preferences became Market Adaptation. Throughout this inductive process, I privileged the participants' own terms. This stage produced 88 initial codes that directly reflected the dataset.

4.2.3 Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Once coding was complete, I examined the relationships between codes. I grouped similar codes to form broader, meaningful categories. For example, codes like Spice Customization, Vegetarian Options, and Menu Simplification were clustered under the candidate theme Market-Led Adaptation. Codes such as Family Recipe Preservation and Traditional Cooking Methods were grouped into Culinary Heritage Protection. This phase marked a key shift from describing the data to interpreting its deeper patterns and meanings

4.2.4 Phase 4: Reviewing and Refining Themes

Next, I rigorously reviewed each candidate's theme. I checked them against all the relevant coded extracts and re-read the original open-ended questionnaire dataset to ensure a good fit. This iterative process led me to refine the themes- merging, splitting, or discarding them to best represent the data. For example, I merged the initial themes "Service Ethos" and "Ambience Design" into a new, unified theme called "Orchestrating the Experiential Encounter." This

integration more accurately captured their interdependent role in creating the customer's total experience.

4.2.5 Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Finally, I produced clear definitions for each theme to capture its central idea and contribution to the overall analysis. I selected final thematic names that were both succinct and rich in meaning. This stage concluded with a refined set of five principal themes

1. The Authenticity-Adaptation Dialectic: Negotiating Culinary Identity
2. Articulating Multidimensional Value: Beyond Gastronomy
3. Orchestrating the Experiential Encounter: Service and Ambience as Strategic Tools
4. Interpreting and Shaping Consumer Perceptions in a Cross-Cultural Market
5. Strategic Positioning and Sectoral Trajectories: Competition and Future Outlook

4.2.6 Phase 6: Producing the Report

The final phase involved writing the analytic narrative for the findings chapter. I selected compelling and representative extracts to illustrate each theme. By synthesizing participant voices with my interpretive analysis, I transformed the data into a coherent account that directly addresses the research objectives.

4.3. Thematic Development and Interpretation

This section presents a systematic analysis of qualitative data, moving from raw participant narratives to high-level strategic themes. By following Braun and Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006) reflexive thematic analysis, the findings are grounded in the empirical data while remaining theoretically aligned with the concepts of value proposition and cultural negotiation.

The analysis identified five interconnected themes that define how Indian restaurants operate within the Danish market.

Theme 1: The Authenticity-Adaptation Dialectic

For the restaurateurs in this study, running a business meant constantly negotiating between heritage and the market. This wasn't an abstract dilemma; it was the daily work of value creation. Owners spoke about it not as a fixed rule to follow, but as a series of conscious, sometimes difficult, choices. Take one owner's explanation: "applying the proper spices appropriately." This simple phrase draws a critical line in the sand. It separates the core, non-negotiable techniques from elements like spice intensity, which are seen as adaptable. Another owner's goal was to "remain true to our fundamental flavors while considering local preferences." Here, the term "considering" reframes from adaptation as an attentive dialogue rather than a concession. Collectively, these perspectives reveal a strategic model that is- an authentic culinary core is intentionally enveloped in an adaptive, market-responsive layer.

Frontline service interactions provided the practical counterpart to this strategic vision. Staff participants showed that adaptation often involves managing cultural preconceptions, not just taste preferences. One participant noted that certain customers still equate "Indian food with spicy food." This highlights how simplistic market stereotypes create daily operational friction. The contrast is telling while owners articulate a philosophy of curated adaptation, staff navigate the ongoing reality of customer assumptions. This indicates the authenticity-adaptation tension is not resolved in the kitchen; it is perpetually re-negotiated during the service encounter.

Menu development emerges as an act of strategic cultural translation. The owner determines which elements of heritage are essential and which can be designed and presented for a new audience. The recurring need to explain these decisions reinforces their role as a cultural mediator, bridging the strategic work of value creation with the interactive process of co-creation.

Theme 2: Articulating Multidimensional Value

The value didn't just come from the food. It was built with a mix of story and strategy. This shows how owners deliver value through what they say and how they present themselves. A key move was linking food to personal history. When one owner shared, "We bring recipes from my mother's kitchen," it wasn't just a menu note. It was an authenticity signal, adding what we might call a 'heritage value'. It is a layer of meaning that sets the place apart in a busy market.

But that story alone is not enough for the Danish diner. Owners also made a clear, practical promise about quality. The same owner pointed out, "We may not be the lowest priced, but our goal is to provide the best value." That phrase, "best value," is strategic. It tells customers to look beyond the price tag and consider the entire experience. Here's the wise part- these two statements work as a pair. The family story builds a unique, memorable identity, while the value promise builds trust and justifies the cost. One attracts and the other reassures.

This dual-track approach creates a resilient proposition. The heritage narrative can support a slightly higher price for those seeking a genuine experience. Meanwhile, the focus on fair value keeps the restaurant accessible and trustworthy for the broader market. It's not one or the other. It's a calculated blend designed to speak to different customer priorities at once.

In short, communicating value is about telling the right story and making the right promise. Owners act as both narrators and strategists. They weave emotional appeal with practical reassurance. This careful communication is what turns a kitchen's output into an inviting proposition and setting the stage for the customer's own role in the experience.

Theme 3: Orchestrating the Experiential Encounter

For these restaurants, the "product" is the entire visit, and the service is the feel of the space and the cleanliness as well. This theme is about the active delivery of value through a staged environment. The owners talked about blending cultures intentionally. One described it as treating guests like family, yet making sure "hygge is vital here." This is telling. The atmosphere isn't just background. It's a tool for translation. It combines the warmth of Indian hospitality with a deeply Danish sense of cozy comfort and making the unfamiliar feel safe and welcoming. But a nice atmosphere only works if the basics are flawless. This emotional design was always backed by a focus on visible and professional standards. As the manager put it, "Good food, upholding cleanliness, and a smile are very important." While the owner designs the vibe, the manager focuses on the pillars of daily trust which depend on quality, hygiene, and friendliness. So, the experience is built on two levels- the conceptual blend of cultures and the non-negotiable reliability of execution.

This highlights a natural division in focus. The owner's job is the big-picture concept; the "what" and "why" of the experience. The staff's job is the "how"; making that concept real through consistent, high-quality service at every single touchpoint. The beautiful concept fails if the execution is poor.

Delivering value is a total performance. The restaurant stages a coherent, comfortable, and trustworthy world. This intentional staging is what makes value co-creation possible. A welcoming, professional environment puts customers at ease, making them more likely to engage positively, ask questions, and ultimately co-create a satisfying and culturally meaningful meal.

Theme 4: Interpreting and Shaping Consumer Perceptions in a Cross-Cultural Market

The restaurants don't just serve food. They actively shape how it's understood. This happens where delivery meets experience, highlighting the owner's role as educator and translator. The market itself is a mix of old and new views. An owner saw progress, with customers "shifting away from the 'curry' stereotype." Yet a staff member still faced the old assumption that "Indian food equates to spicy food." The restaurants have to speak to two audiences at once: the curious learner and the customer with fixed ideas.

Their key tactic is turning service interactions into teaching moments. One participant didn't just resolve a complaint; they "turned the complaint into a cooking masterclass." This is a strategic pivot. It moves from simply fixing a problem to adding value through explanation. A customer's confusion becomes a chance to build appreciation, justify choices, deepen their understanding, and make the meal more valuable.

This shows adaptation goes beyond the plate. It's also about adapting the customer's understanding. Staff become on-the-spot cultural mediators, translating the "why" behind the food in real time. They bridge the gap between the kitchen's intention and the diner's perception.

In this light, the owner is a proactive cultural intermediary. Managing perception is both defensive (handling stereotypes) and offensive (educating through conversation). This guidance

is essential for value co-creation, because a customer's sense of authenticity and satisfaction is deeply shaped by these interpretive interactions during the meal itself.

Theme 5: Strategic Positioning and Sectoral Trajectories

The Owners think about competition in the broadest sense and are already planning for tomorrow. This theme shows the loop between what works today (value capture) and what needs to change tomorrow (renewed value creation). They see themselves warring for a share of the general dining budget. As one owner said plainly, "We rival Italian, Sushi, and New Nordic establishments." This is a category of substitution. They're not just the best Indian option. They are competing with every popular choice for a night out. To win, they need a strong reason to be chosen over all others.

Their vision is tied to big-picture trends. Another owner pointed to the "rising demand for international cuisine and plant-based dishes." Read this next to the first quote, and a two-part strategy emerges- compete in the broad mainstream now, while also adapting to societal shifts in health and sustainability for the future. This means their "hybridity" isn't just cultural (Indian-Danish); it's also temporal, adapting across time to stay relevant.

The message is clear here- success demands constant attention. Owners watch the market, note trends, and tweak their model perhaps by adding vegan options or highlighting sourcing. They make changes that keep their cultural soul intact while becoming more accessible.

In these cases, maintaining relevance appeared to require ongoing attention to shifting preferences and competitive alternatives rather than indicating guaranteed outcomes. These reflections show how participants anticipate future pressures and describe adaptation as a continuing practice.

4.4 Discussion

This research sought to understand how Indian restaurants in Denmark define and present their value to customers. The findings offer a view of this process as an ongoing practice of balancing different priorities, which might be described as strategic adaptation. Rather than following a single formula, owners appear to negotiate their position by aligning their culinary heritage with

local market expectations. Their accounts suggest they do not simply present "Indian food," but work to make it relevant through choices about the menu, service, and the restaurant's overall atmosphere. This perspective provides a response to the research question and situates concepts of value and authenticity within the practical decisions of running a restaurant in a new cultural context.

A consistent theme was that authenticity is treated as something fluid and managed. While much research examines how customers perceive authenticity. This study highlights the owner's role in actively shaping that perception. Participants described navigating the tension between tradition and adaptation not as a conflict, but as a series of daily choices which include- owner's personal struggle between cultural pride and the practical need to please a Danish guest with calibrating spice levels, explaining dishes, or framing the menu. This resonates with literature framing authenticity as a social negotiation and with the known challenges of ethnic entrepreneurship. The contribution here lies in illustrating these abstract concepts through concrete, operational examples from the participants' own experiences.

This managerial work also shapes what the restaurant offers. Participants constructed value not only through food quality but by weaving in narratives of heritage, signals of trust, and cues of professionalism. In essence, they combine tangible and intangible elements to create a distinct proposition. A key part of this is the owner's own cultural insight is their ability to interpret and present their cuisine in a way that feels both genuine and accessible to a Danish audience. The offer thus becomes less about a generic category and more about providing a guided and approachable experience.

Communication extends beyond marketing to encompass the entire staged environment of the restaurant. The findings are consistent with the view of restaurants as cultural spaces. A specific insight from this context is that communication aims to make the unfamiliar feel trustworthy. Participants often mentioned blending Indian hospitality with Danish expectations of comfort and clarity, creating a setting that reduces uncertainty for guests. This supports the idea that delivering value involves making the offering interpretable and usable for the customer. Ultimately, the success of this proposed value is determined during the service itself. The findings align with the perspective that value is realized through use and interaction. In a cross-cultural dining context, this interaction often involves an element of cultural guidance, where staff help customers understand and appreciate the meal. This suggests that competitiveness may

be linked to the restaurant's ability to facilitate positive and reassuring encounters, where the customer feels both engaged and at ease. Such encounters can foster the loyalty and positive reputation that support a sustainable business.

In summary, the concept of "safe novelty" is the Danish preference for new experiences within familiar bounds which offers a useful lens. The findings indicate that participants work to deliver this through selective adaptation, thoughtful staging, and attentive service. Viewed together, these interconnected activities can be understood as a form of ongoing, strategic adaptation. By focusing on the operator's perspective, this study complements existing consumer-focused research and provides a grounded account of how value and authenticity are navigated in the practical reality of operating an ethnic restaurant in Denmark.

5. Limitations of the Study

While this research offers a structured exploration of how Indian restaurants in Denmark construct value propositions and negotiate authenticity, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged. These constraints define the scope of the findings and indicate useful directions for future research.

The empirical foundation rests on ten self-administered, open-ended questionnaires response which was conducted in December 2025. Although this sample enabled rich qualitative insights, it is not statistically representative of all Indian restaurants in Denmark. Participants were self-selected and primarily based in urban areas, which may limit the transferability of themes such as the authenticity and adaptation of dialectic to rural contexts or different business models.

Methodologically, the study relies exclusively on self-reported data from owners, managers, and chefs. While these accounts reveal strategic intent and perceived challenges, they were not triangulated with observational data, customer feedback, or performance metrics. Insights concerning consumer perception and service delivery thus reflect managerial perspectives rather than externally verified practices.

Additionally, the use of a self-administered questionnaire, while logistically advantageous, may have yielded less nuanced data than in-depth interviews. The absence of real-time probing and

follow-up questions limited the researcher's ability to explore interesting avenues in greater depth or to clarify ambiguous responses, potentially resulting in a somewhat less rich dataset than interviews would have provided.

The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis but was conducted by a single researcher. Although systematic and documented, this approach entails interpretive subjectivity. The resulting thematic framework should therefore be understood as a constructed interpretation rather than an objective representation.

Finally, the study focuses solely on Indian cuisine, which limits generalisability to other ethnic dining sectors. The cultural and market position of Indian food in Denmark may not parallel that of other cuisines. Additionally, conducting interviews in English a second language for most participants may have constrained the expression of nuanced cultural or emotional meanings, particularly around themes of heritage and identity.

These limitations do not diminish the study's contribution but clarify its boundaries. They suggest valuable opportunities for future research using mixed methods, longitudinal or comparative designs, and broader geographic sampling to further explore value construction in cross-cultural dining contexts.

6. Future Research

This study opened a window into how Indian restaurants in Denmark balance tradition and change. But it is just a start. There are many ways future research can build on what we learned here.

One good next step would be to talk to customers. I spoke with restaurant owners, managers and chefs, but not with the people eating the food. How do Danish diners feel about authenticity? What makes them trust or not trust an ethnic restaurant? Their stories would help complete the picture.

Another idea is to follow restaurants over time. I collected the responses in December 2025, but restaurants don't stand still. Visiting the same places again in a year or two could show how their

strategies evolve. Do they stick to their “non-negotiables”? Do they adapt further? Time would tell.

Researchers could also compare different cuisines. This study focused on Indian food, but what about Thai, Mexican, or Lebanese restaurants in Denmark? Are their challenges similar? Do they balance authenticity and adaptation in the same way? A side-by-side look could reveal what is unique to Indian dining and what is shared.

Spending time inside restaurants could also deepen understanding. Instead of just talking, watching how food is prepared, how staff interact with guests, and how the atmosphere changes during a service could add a rich, observational layer to what owners say they do.

Finally, it would be valuable to include more voices from outside the cities. My participants were mostly from urban areas. Talking with restaurant owners in smaller towns or rural areas could uncover different pressures, customer expectations, and ways of keeping tradition alive.

Each of these paths could help us understand not just Indian restaurants, but how food, culture, and business meet in Denmark and beyond. The conversation is just beginning.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the processes through which Indian restaurants in Denmark develop and articulate their value propositions. Drawing on qualitative accounts from ten participants, the findings suggest that these establishments approach their market positioning through continuous practice of strategic adaptation. This involves an ongoing negotiation between preserving elements of culinary heritage and implementing pragmatic adjustments to align with local Danish expectations and dining norms.

Within the dataset, authenticity emerges not as a static or objective quality, but as a managed and situational practice. Participants described making deliberate operational choices such as customizing spice levels, designing menus that balance novelty with familiarity, and blending service styles to sustain cultural credibility while remaining locally intelligible. These adaptations were frequently framed not as a dilution of tradition, but as a form of cultural

translation aimed at making the culinary offering accessible and resonant within a specific market context.

The communication of value extends beyond the culinary product to encompass the orchestration of the total dining experience. Participant accounts highlight the roles of narrative storytelling, atmospheric design, and service interactions in rendering the value proposition legible and compelling. This indicates that the proposition is not merely stated but performed across multiple touchpoints, with the service encounter constituting a key site where proposed value may be validated or contested through direct interaction and the building of customer trust.

The primary contribution of this research lies in providing an operator-centric perspective on value proposition design within a cross-cultural service setting. By foregrounding the strategic reasoning and micro-decisions of restaurateurs, it offers a complementary viewpoint to a literature that has often prioritized consumer-focused analyses of authenticity and satisfaction. The study thereby illustrates how theoretical constructions such as value co-creation and negotiated authenticity can be examined through the routine, situated practices of hospitality work.

Given its exploratory qualitative design and context-specific focus, this study does not aim to advance generalizable sector-wide claims. Instead, it offers an empirically grounded interpretation of the strategic considerations articulated by a distinct group of practitioners.

Within these parameters, the research underscores the ethnic restaurant as a space for ongoing cultural intermediation, where commercial viability is pursued through a reflective and iterative balancing of tradition and adaptive change.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Guide

Section 1: Participants Information:

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Restaurant Name:

Section 2: Professional Background & Concept Identity

4. Can you tell me a bit about your background and experience in the Danish dining industry?
5. How would you describe the core concept, mission, or identity of your restaurant?
6. How involved are you in decisions related to menu design, branding, or customer experience?

Section 3: Crafting the Value Proposition

7. How do you select and design the dishes on your menu?
8. Do you aim for authenticity, innovation, or a mix?
9. What kind of value do you think your menu offers to Danish customers?

10. How would you describe your service philosophy or approach?
11. What aspects of service do you prioritize to meet customer expectations?
12. What role does ambience (decor, music, atmosphere) play in shaping the dining experience?
13. How intentionally do you design the restaurant environment to communicate your value?
14. Do you see ambience as part of communicating authenticity or modernity? or both?
15. How do you decide on your pricing strategy?
16. What considerations influence your price level (costs, competitors, customer expectations)?
17. How do you communicate your restaurant's identity and value proposition to customers?
18. What communication channels (online/offline) are most effective for your restaurant?
19. What message or story do you want your restaurant branding to convey?

Section 4: Authenticity vs Adaptation

20. How do you define "authentic Indian food" in the Danish context?
21. In what ways have you adapted food, service, or ambience to suit Danish consumer preferences?
22. Are there areas where you intentionally preserve authenticity even if it conflicts with local preferences?
23. Can you think of a situation where staying authentic conflicted with customer expectations? How did you handle that?

Section 5: Understanding Danish Consumer Perception

24. Based on your experience, how do Danish customers perceive Indian cuisine and Indian restaurants?
25. What feedback do you commonly receive from Danish customers regarding food, service, and ambience?
26. What factors do you think influence Danish customers' dining choices (e.g., taste, price, familiarity, health, novelty)?

Section 6: Competition and Market Position

27. How do you view your main competitors (Indian and non-Indian)?

28. What differentiates your restaurant in the Danish dining market?
29. What challenges or opportunities do you see for Indian restaurants competing in Denmark?

Section 7: Future plan/Goal

30. How do you see your restaurant evolving in the next few years?
31. Are there any changes in Danish consumer preferences that you anticipate adapting to?
32. Is there anything else you would like to share that could enrich this research?

Response Overview

Participant ID	Role	Years of Experience	Core Concept / Mission	Menu Strategy	Authenticity vs. Adaptation	Service Philosophy	Key Differentiator	Future Outlook
P1	Owner	7+ years	Authentic North Indian, family recipes, warmth and quality	Mix of authenticity and innovation (e.g., fish dishes, cocktails)	Authentic foundation, adapt spice levels, keep traditional methods	Warm, professional, family-like, <i>hygge</i> -inspired	Traditional recipes, premium dine-in experience, storytelling branding	Event dining, convenience + premium balance, health transparency
P2	Owner & Managing Director	15+ years	Authentic yet approachable, reliable, transparent	Classic dishes adapted for Danish market, mid-range pricing	Authentic techniques, adjust spice, modern presentation	Warm, efficient, professional	Consistency, balanced authenticity, clear branding	Strengthen brand, sustainable offerings

P3	Chef	2 years	Authenticity with local taste balance	Customer feedback-driven, consistency and improvisation	Customize spice, include local sides	Cozy, homely, professional	Customization service	Growth and expansion
P4	Kitchen Assistant	2 years	Healthy, nutritious meals for students	Weekly changing menu, Danish + global inspiration	Blend Danish and Indian, keep tempering technique	Precision, care, daily improvement focus	School catering, nutrition focus	Introduce more Indian dishes
P5	Kitchen Assistant / Student	Part-time while studying,	Authentic flavors, affordable, welcoming takeaway	Popular dishes, quality ingredients, feedback-based	Adjust spice, offer familiar dishes	Friendly, efficient, attentive	Recipes made in-house, local chef	Grow customer base, maintain identity
P6	Kitchen Assistant	Not specified	Introduce Danish people to Indian tastes	Not involved	Authenticity	Good food, good service, smile	Authentic home recipes	Add more branches
P7	Assistant Manager	1.5 years	Indian food with Danish	Variety to suit Danish	Customize spice,	Satisfaction-focused	Use of imported spices	Expand to other cities

			customization	preferences	portion size, style			
P8	Assistant Manager	8 months	South Asian fusion for Danish palate	Fusion creation from multiple dishes	Fully adapted, not authentic	Friendly, warm	Understanding of healthy preferences	Bring in more local experts
P9	Manager	2 years	South Asian-inspired, curated for Danes	Fusion, innovation	No authenticity, fully fusion	Mix of fine + casual = social dining	Ambience, unique dine-in experience	Become best in Aalborg
P10	Waiter/Waitress	Not specified	Authentic but adapted, high quality, welcoming	Management-designed, traditional + demand-based	Mix, adapt spice, cozy atmosphere	Polite, customer-focused, clear communication	Service of Indian drinks	Consistency, menu versatility