

# Role of South Indian Cuisine in Destination Marketing - Study of 5-Star Hotels in Delhi

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## Abstract

Regional food is always a major attraction for tourists. It may be considered the prime need of any human being at all. Current study is focused on the role of regional food v/s marketing of a specific destination with special reference to South Indian food. The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data is collected with the help of a close-ended, well-structured questionnaire while secondary data is collected from various e-resources and published articles which are very close to the study. The study will help hoteliers in making strategies and planning for the promotion of regional cuisine at their end, which helps to promote Delhi as a tourist destination on the basis of regional food. It will also be beneficial in attracting international tourist by promoting the regional food.

**Keywords:** Regional Food, South Indian Cuisine, Tourist, Promotion, Destination.

## INTRODUCTION

Southern India comprises of the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala & Telangana which are well known for serving versatility cuisine around the world. Food is always a major constituent of tourism, motivating tourists to visit a specified place. Regional cuisine has the potential to enhance the level of satisfaction of a traveller if the service is up to the mark and the food served has its distinct authenticity. Both factors are crucial to food branding, which creates the peculiar image of a destination (Rand et al., 2003). South Indian food is very popular due to its versatility in India as well as other parts of the world. Almost every hotel in Delhi serves south Indian food as it is light, tasty and good for health. The food is served in speciality restaurants like Udupi and

also at different food points in Delhi. It is also served at kiosks throughout in Delhi. Hotel Shangrila, Vivanta by Taj, Hilton, ITC Maurya, Radisson Blue, ITC Fortune and many more hotels in Delhi serve South Indian food. Many hotels have live counters to serve the food.

The taste of South Indian food varies from state to state. It ranges from extremely spicy, mildly spicy to less spicy. Hyderabad biryani is famous around the world. A lot of studies have been done regarding the dining experience of local and regional cuisine. Still, there is very limited research about food preferences with reference to South Indian cuisine served in the northern of India and that is particularly 5-star hotels of Delhi. Hence there is a scope to understand this important aspect of food choice to create a market of South Indian food at the International level.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Food is one of the most important components for the overall tourist experience. It always plays a prominent role in travel attraction and motivation. Traditional food motivates tourists to choose a particular destination. Regional food gives a memorable experience to tourists (Almeida, A., & Garrod, B. 2017). Tourists enjoy eating during their trip and this is considering most favourable activity. Hsu et al., 2009 found in their study that food adds value during choosing a destination and is a very important factor (Hsu et al., 2009). Food is the basic element which inspires tourist to decide the destination; hence it is used as the source of motivation. Moreover, food is a combination of regional and cultural dimensions which tends to inspire the tourist to visit a creation location (Everett, S., & Aitchison, C. 2008). Food attraction of a destination helps to generate food tourism at that particular

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place. (Everett & Slocum, 2013) In their study define food tourism in the form of a combination of distinct cuisine at certain regions which promote the regional identity with economic growth and development of that region. Food is the key element to present the rural communities and also promote locality, hence, food is the backbone with its own strength which tends to promote the market of a local area. Any hospitality is encouraged by tourist when food is considered as well as served with a core of authenticity (Alonso, A. D., & Liu, Y. 2012).

Cuisine of a particular destination represents and helps in identification of the culture and heritage of that area. Food plays an important role in destination sustainability and hence, food can be used as a tool which also helps in marketing planning and promotional activity for destinations (Baruah, S. R. 2016). According to research conducted by the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (World Tourism Organization, 2017), food is an important variable to choose the destination. According to tourist perception, regional food helps in exploring culture for a destination (Bukharov, I., & Berezka, S. 2018). Unique and different food can easily make a place in the mindset of the consumer as the food choice of today's consumer is very demanding in this competitive world. Tourists are aware of food attributes with all its aspects like taste, flavour, texture, presentation, price, portion and many more. Hence destination makers of food outlets need to present their food in a cohesive, idiosyncratic and exclusive way to attract more and more consumer (Ghodeswar, B. M., 2008).

Food image is considered as a variable in research is important for both consumers as well as destination maker. Emerging trends in food provide a platform of uniqueness which is recognized and categorize the differentiation of cuisines. This differentiation can be used as valuable tool for destination development in many countries for a particular region too (Updhyay, Y., & Sharma, D., 2014). The differentiation of food must be indicating the local and regional identity of food so that it plays an important role in identifying the culture of any destination, as food is an integral part of a visit and tourist like to enjoy regional or local food during the stay. Therefore it can be used as a media to attract tourists or as a marketing tool for any destination (Du Rand et al., 2006). Local and regional cuisine can be used as a very effective tool for destination marketing more variety

of cuisine whether local, regional or international. Food choice helps in choosing the destination (Okumus, B., & Cetin, G. 2018). Selection of tourist destination with particular reference to food influences the market as well as the tourist. This concept is directly proportional to food and tourist. Food also showcases the cultural identity of a country, hence can be used as an effective promotional tool for destination marketing. Around 40% share of the money is spent by a tourist of their total budget (Ab Karim et al., 2010). The versatility of India is always attracting international tourist in many ways including regional identity, cooking methods, mother ingredients and many more. Food like Masala Dosa, Biryani and curries are very popular in many countries that include UK, USA, Canada and many more. Tourist attraction is not only to taste the cuisine but they find to very keen to learn the regional dishes (Banrjee M., 2015).

Researchers have discussed the role of food in tourism with special reference to sustainable and economic development of any destination. Food can be treated as an image barding but in a very positive way. A satisfied tourist after their tour definitely recommends the food and destination which motivates others to visit the destination and try the regional food. Hence, food provides a special identification of a destination (Duarte Alonso et al., 2018). Tourists have an interest in local and regional food. Keeping that in mind the destination maker used the food as a source of attraction. Food is used as branding, advertising and marketing tool for destination sustainability. Regional food always plays a role for destination development as well as economic growth for a particular area or region (Lin, Y. C. et al., 2011). Travelling attributes include the location of place visited, other facility that include accommodation, service, ambience and many more. But food is always a source of motivation for the overall tourist experience. (McKercher et al., 2008) As Food from the South part of India has a unique taste with a different flavour, it has a tendency to attract tourists. Tourism is directly associated with food as a basic need during travel. The quality of food served at the destination attracts tourists and help them to enjoy culture with food. Food-related cultural traditions are experiences that are often sought after by modern tourists (Tasi et al., 2017). Promotion of tourist destination is directly based upon quality of food served. Consuming local food is always a new experience for tourist. By the means of consuming local food one can explore the culture of the place and that always becomes

a memorable experience for a long time (Choe, J. Y. J., & Kim, S. S. 2018).

Food branding and promotion is a key element to attract the consumer who is being used by many destination makers. On the one hand, it is quite difficult to define the attribute of regional cuisine is a big deal while at the other hand feature of food identify the destination at a par (Lai, M. Y. et al., 2018). Food image is based on the service of authentic regional food. An attractive atmosphere, maintained hygiene standard, reasonable price and adequate food portion, plating techniques and quality service are also the part of food marketing. They help in improving the quality which is the prime desire of a tourist in the current scenario (Hwang, J. et al., 2012).

Delightful experiences of food satisfy the tourists in every way with the satisfaction of all five sensory organs. Therefore cooking is considered as an art. Local food is a blended combination of culture and heritage, hence destination maker should have a deep knowledge of all to promote and market the local cuisine in an effective manner (Chang, R. C., & Mak, A. H. 2018). A unique and authentic local cuisine helps to create the special space in developing market. But it also needs a proper formulation of strategy, planning, advertising and process to achieve it. Local cuisine builds the identity of a country if marketed efficiently. Food flavors always attract tourists and are highlighted in the process of marketing which identifies the destination with a food image (Jalis, M. H. 2016). Sensory experience leaves lasting impact of a destination even a long time after the tour. Food is a medium to explore the new flavorful experience and the knowledge and techniques used in food preparation. Food is a way to relax and to enjoy someone else's cooking which motivates people to enjoy and explore the sensory experience (Chen, Y. Y. 2013).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this research was to promote South Indian cuisine at national and international levels. Delhi is far from South India, even though plenty of hotels are serving the South Indian cuisine in their menu. But most hotels are serving breakfast at a frequent rate even though the liking of South Indian food is quite good. Hence on the above bases, the study helps:

- To explore the role of South Indian food in the marketing of a particular destination.

- To determine the various activities performed by the 5-star hotels of Delhi to promote South Indian food.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is South Indian cuisine used as a tool to promote a destination with reference to tourism?
- What are the roles of a hotel to promote South Indian food?

## MATERIAL & METHOD

This study is based on mix methods that include quantitative as well as qualitative approach to explore the role of South Indian food for destination marketing. A questionnaire has been framed as a tool for data collection. The questions were designed in such a manner that it tends to fulfil all the objectives of the study. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions, aiming at investigating the activities, marketing strategies, policies for the promotion of South Indian cuisine at various levels.

The Questionnaire contains a variety of questions including short answer type questions, multiple-choice questions and questions with a choice of a linear scale with all necessary variables which helps to achieve the objectives of this study.

Short answer type questions were designed to gather the demographic information like the name of the hotel, year of establishment, the designation of the respondent, the number of food outlets in the hotel and many more. Other questions based on multiple choices and linear scales were designed to investigate the involvement of hotels activity to promote South Indian cuisine at their level. The range of linear scale was from 1 = disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

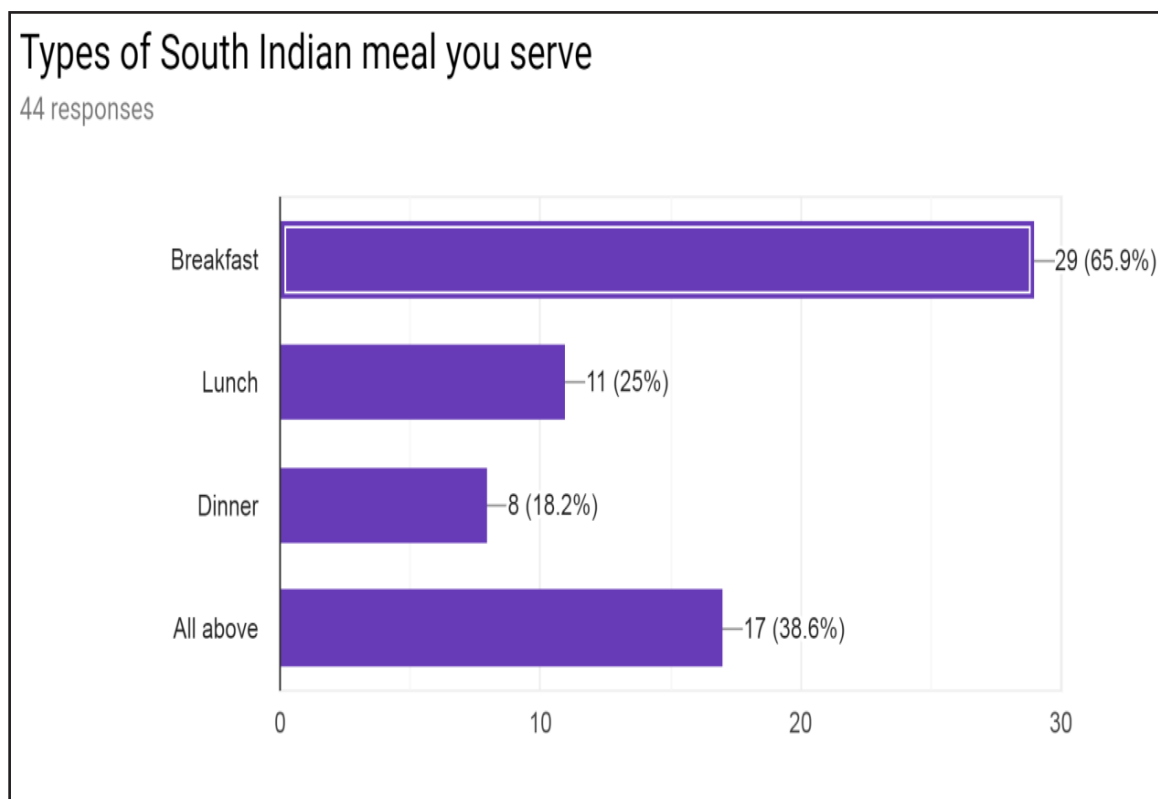
Participants of this study were 5-star hotels of Delhi. The study is based on the response of thirty 5-star hotels and 45 participants fill the questionnaire. Respondents were chosen from various departments like Marketing, Kitchen, and Food & Beverage Service from Crown Plaza, Holiday-Inn, ITC Maurya, JW Marriott, Hyatt, The Lodhi, Radisson Blue, The Lalit, Lemon Tree, Taj Palace, Welcome and many more hotels.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

The study looked at the techniques which can help to promote a destination with the help of regional food. Types of guests visited a hotel can be a factor that can be included in this type of study. In this study, it is found that around 86.4% of guests were business class. 56.8% were a tourist, and 40.9% were found, foodies. This shows that some of total of tourist and foodies (56.8% + 40.9% = 97.7%). Tourists spend almost 40% of their budget on

food during travelling; hence food of a particular area has been recognised as an effective promotional and positioning tool of a destination (Ab Karim, S., & Chi, C. G. Q. 2010).

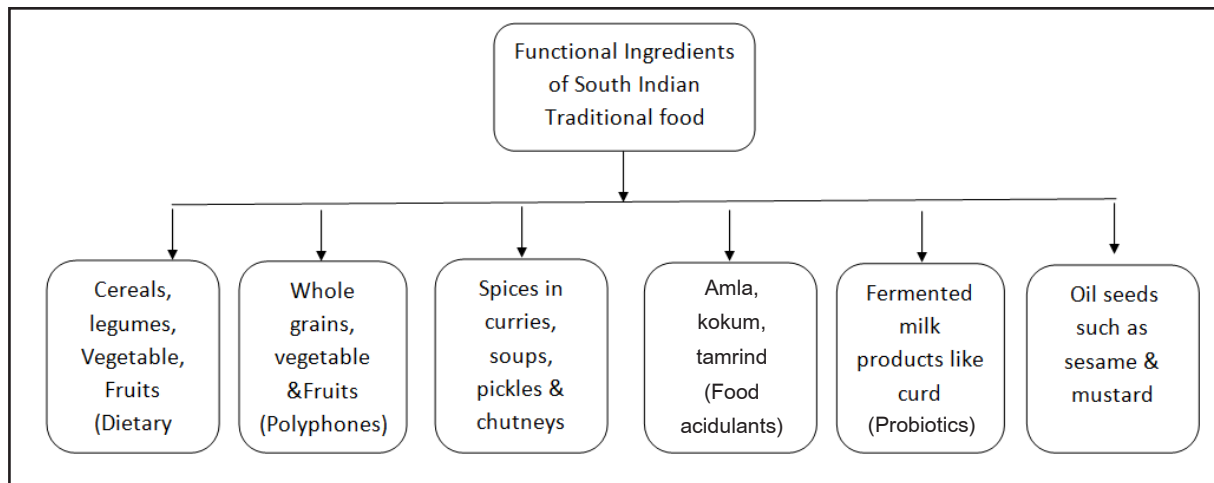
Results show that around 95.6% of hotels are serving South Indian food in their menu. This indicates a good demand of South Indian food, but even after that only 38.6% of hotels are serving all meals. 65.9% of hotels are serving only breakfast items, whereas 25% are serving lunch, and 18.2% are serving dinner as shown in (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1: Types of Meal Served by Star Hotels in Delhi**

It shows that hotels need to concentrate on serving all meals accordingly. Chefs need to highlight the health

benefits of South Indian foods with reference to functional ingredients as shown in (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2: Functional Ingredients of South Indian Cuisine**

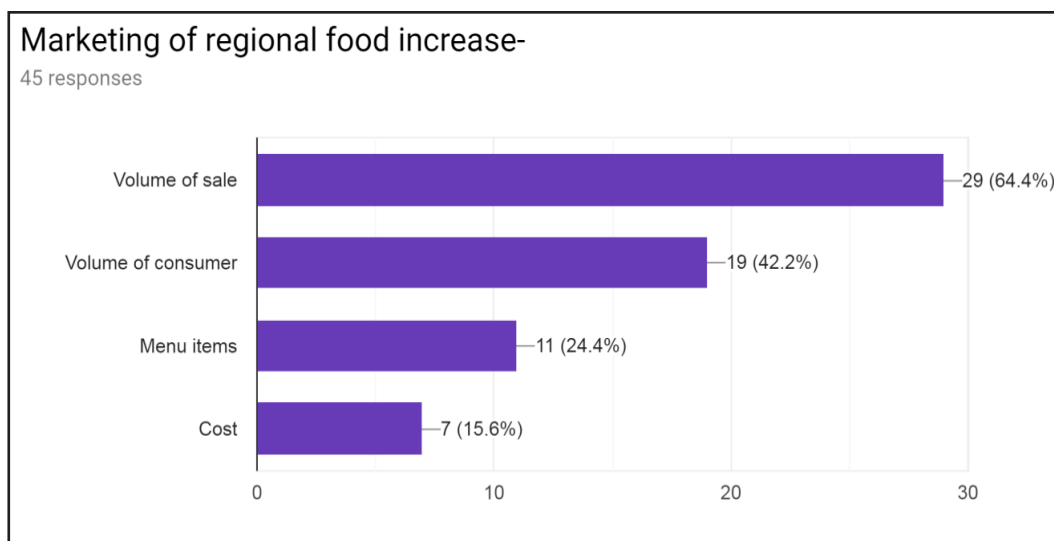
## MARKETING & PROMOTION OF SOUTH INDIAN CUISINE

The role of food in destination marketing always seems to be a “pull” factor and works as a motivational factor. Tourist destination is linked with food identity. Food, when combined with tourism, plays an important role in highlighting the destination (Jain, A. et al., 2015). Current study shows that 95.6% hotels have their separate marketing departments, and only 62.2% hotels have a marketing strategy to promote South Indian food of their hotels. Various studies show that local cuisines have been an effective strategy for destination marketing (Okumus, B., & Cetin, G. 2018) and results of the study show that 91.1% hotels are aware of the importance of food marketing. Hence, there is a greater chance for the team or staff of hotels to know about the importance of food marketing.

The culinary resources and culture (e.g. ingredients, cooking styles and presentation) are location-specific and

can play an important role in destination image formation; hence, the involvement of hotel staff for various activities like food fest, food show, food mela etc. can motivate the tourist to choose specific food. In September 2018, Radisson Blu Hotel in Dwarka, New Delhi organised a week-long food festival named ‘Dakshin Express’ where they served dinner buffet with flavours of South Indian regions and also arranged interactive cooking sessions by chefs. This kind of initiative will increase the level of popularity of certain cuisine and of course demand. It is found that only 53.2% hotels of Delhi are involved in such kind of activity particularly for South Indian cuisine. Hence, there is a huge gap to fill in these kinds of activities to promote South Indian food.

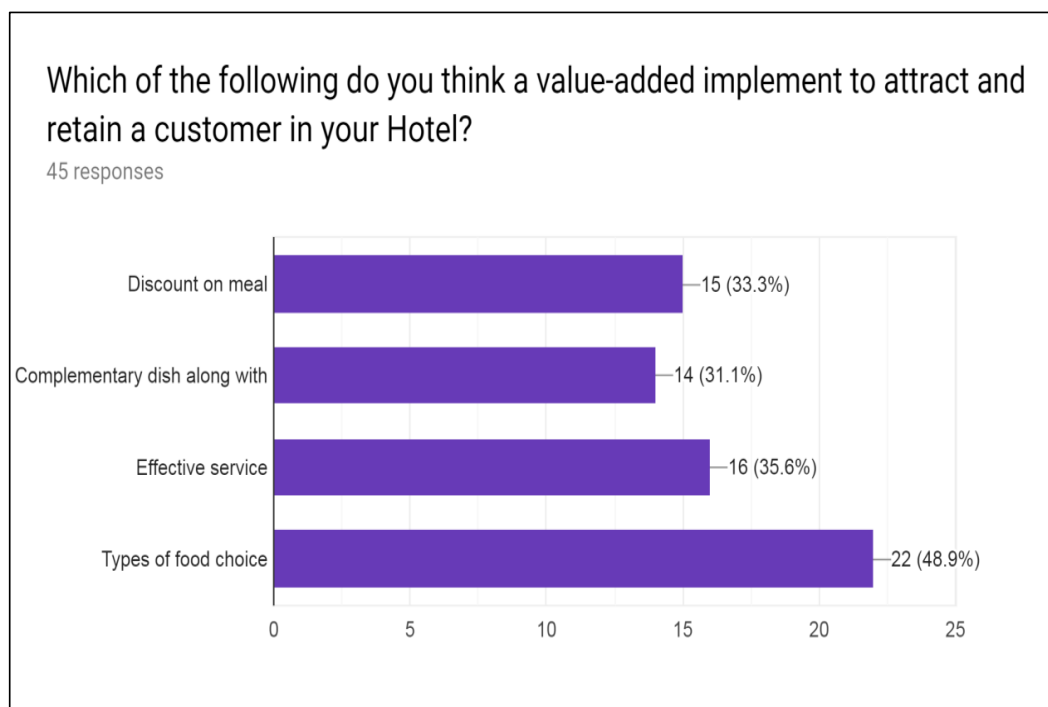
The current study shows that marketing of regional food also increases the volume of sale and volume of the customer as shown in (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3: Increasing in Sales & Consumer by Food Marketing**

The volume of sales helps in profit generation, and of course, the volume of the customer helps in building the brand identity of a hotel. The current study shows that about 75.5% hoteliers agree that south Indian food contributes very good and good amounts of margin in

total revenue and 60% hotels agree that marketing of regional food helps in sale share. Type of food choice is also a value-added factor which attracts the customer in a hotel, helping brand identity and improving the sales as shown below:



**Fig. 4: Value Added Implementation to Attract & Retain Customer**

While talking about the promotional phase, regional food can also play a critical role in building and keeping countrywide identification. Regional food can serve as an effective agent in state-building because it appears to be

a benign element of a culture. When a cuisine serves as a defining function of a place, it isn't always a politically neutral system (Blue, G. 2008). In the current study, 67.7% respondents agree that South Indian cuisine can

be used as a promotional tool at the international level, which attracts and motivates tourist around the world.

Researchers have also mentioned the impacts of globalisation, fast trends in facts technology and the internet and the consequent effects on the tourism industries. There was a speedy source for promotion and marketing. About 64.4% of hotels are using the same technique for promotion of regional cuisine served in the hotel. Hotels need to involve the stakeholders to promote the same. Still, 8.9% of hotels did not use any medium to promote regional cuisine. This seems to be creating gaps which can be filling by food promotion as food promotion efforts attempt to convey notions of wholesomeness and tradition (Boyne, S. et al., 2003). Regional food can also decorate the identity of destinations due to the fact it is strongly associated with ways of lifestyles in particular region by producing a unique photo that can fortify a traveller's average perception of a destination and via differentiating that destination from others (Tsai, C. T. S. et al., 2017). Hence regional food can be used as a tool for marketing and promotion of a destination at the international level, and involvement of hotels and stakeholders is essential to fulfill this act.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The conclusions of the study need to be considered in light of several limitations. Firstly, the questionnaire was sent out via Google forms. Respondents might have had limited information and also did not want to share some specific information like the name of the Hotel and designation. Secondly, visitor experience with the purpose of visit can be added to explore more close result. Target universe was 5-star hotels of Delhi, instead of speciality food outlets like Dosa Plaza, Sagar Ratna, Vaango, Udipi, Madras Coffee House and many more. These specialities food outlets also attract foodie tourists. Furthermore, the respondents of this study were of younger age brackets that are trainees, which could be overrepresented in the data set. If the sample was larger, more valid and reliable results could have been observed.

## ABBREVIATIONS

DMS- Destination Marketing System  
 ITC- Indian Tobacco Company  
 UNWTO- United Nation World Tourism Organization

UK- United Kingdom

USA- United State America

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## FIGURE LEGENDS

Fig. 1: Graphical representation of type's meal served by hotels

Fig. 2: Functional ingredients of South Indian traditional food

Fig. 3: Graphical representation of regional food marketing.

Fig. 4: Graphical representation of mode of customer retention in hotels

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.