Decoding Consumer Behavior in Online Food Delivery: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

The rapid growth of online food delivery (OFD) services has transformed consumer dining habits, with factors such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience playing crucial roles in shaping consumer behavior. This study explores the perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes of OFD consumers in Coimbatore, employing a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a supplementary survey involving 150 respondents. The findings reveal that convenience is the most significant driver of OFD adoption, followed by pricing sensitivity, service reliability, and digital platform usability. Consumers prefer platforms that offer fast delivery, competitive pricing, and user-friendly interfaces, with Swiggy and Zomato emerging as the most favored choices. However, challenges such as high delivery charges, late deliveries, and inconsistent food quality negatively impact consumer satisfaction. The study underscores the need for platforms to enhance service efficiency, improve affordability, and refine digital experiences to meet evolving consumer expectations. These insights provide valuable implications for food aggregators, policymakers, and restaurants, helping them develop consumer-centric strategies. Future research could explore AI-driven personalization, sustainability in food delivery, and the impact of emerging technologies on consumer preferences.

Keywords: Online Food Delivery, Consumer Behavior, Thematic Analysis, Digital Experience, Service Quality

Introduction

In recent years, the online food delivery (OFD) industry has experienced exponential growth, fundamentally transforming how consumers access and consume meals. This surge is largely attributed to advancements in technology, urbanization, and shifting consumer lifestyles that prioritize convenience and efficiency. The proliferation of smartphones and internet accessibility has enabled consumers to explore a vast array of culinary options from the comfort of their homes, leading to a paradigm shift in traditional dining experiences. As the OFD market continues to expand, understanding the underlying factors that influence consumer behavior within this domain has become imperative for businesses aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. A critical examination of consumer behavior in the context of online food delivery reveals several key themes that significantly impact decision-making processes. Convenience emerges as a paramount factor, with consumers valuing the ability to effortlessly browse

menus, place orders, and receives meals without the constraints of time and location. The streamlined nature of OFD services aligns with the fast-paced lifestyles of modern consumers, offering a practical solution to time limitations and the desire for hassle-free meal procurement. Studies have demonstrated that the perceived ease of use and time-saving attributes of OFD platforms positively influence consumer attitudes and their intention to utilize these services (Chowdhury, 2023).

Pricing also plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors in the OFD sector. The competitive landscape of online food delivery has led service providers to implement various pricing strategies, including discounts, promotions, and dynamic pricing models, to attract and retain customers. Consumers are often enticed by cost savings and perceive value in services that offer financial benefits. However, the sensitivity to pricing varies among different demographic groups, with some consumers prioritizing cost-effectiveness while others may place a higher value on quality and service. Understanding these nuances is essential for OFD platforms to tailor their offerings and pricing structures to meet the diverse needs of their customer base (Chakraborty et al., 2024). Service quality encompasses various dimensions, including timely delivery, accuracy of orders, food quality upon arrival, and customer support. The reliability and efficiency of these services directly influence customer satisfaction and their likelihood of repeat usage. Negative experiences, such as delayed deliveries or incorrect orders, can significantly deter consumers from future engagement with a platform. Therefore, maintaining high standards of service quality is imperative for fostering positive consumer relationships and sustaining competitive advantage in the OFD market (Khan et al., 2023).

The digital experience provided by OFD platforms is another critical determinant of consumer behavior. A user-friendly interface, seamless navigation, and secure payment systems enhance the overall customer experience, making the process of ordering food online more appealing. The integration of features such as real-time order tracking, personalized recommendations, and responsive customer service further enriches the digital interaction, leading to increased consumer engagement and satisfaction. As consumers become more accustomed to digital solutions in various aspects of their lives, their expectations for sophisticated and intuitive OFD platforms continue to rise (Keeble et al., 2022). In conclusion, the rapid evolution of the online food delivery industry necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing consumer behavior. By delving into themes such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience, businesses can develop targeted strategies that resonate with their audience, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and fostering loyalty. As the market becomes increasingly saturated, the ability to decode and adapt to consumer preferences will serve as a critical differentiator for OFD service providers aiming to achieve sustained success in this dynamic landscape.

Problem Defined

The rapid proliferation of online food delivery (OFD) services has revolutionized the food industry, significantly altering consumer dining habits and preferences. With the increasing reliance on digital platforms for food ordering, consumer behavior in this domain has become a focal point for businesses, researchers, and policymakers. Despite the industry's remarkable growth, several fundamental questions regarding consumer behavior remain inadequately explored. Understanding the key factors influencing consumer choices, perceptions, and decision-making processes in the OFD sector is critical for improving service quality, enhancing user experience, and ensuring customer satisfaction. This study aims to address these gaps by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis to decode consumer behavior in online food delivery. One of the primary concerns in the OFD industry is the role of convenience in shaping consumer

choices. Convenience has been identified as a key driver behind the increased adoption of online food delivery platforms, yet the extent to which it influences long-term engagement and loyalty remains unclear. Consumers prioritize ease of access, speed of service, and flexibility in ordering, but their expectations may vary based on demographic, socio-economic, and lifestyle factors. Additionally, the impact of external influences, such as busy work schedules, urbanization, and changing dietary habits, on consumer preferences needs further investigation. This study seeks to uncover how convenience affects consumer behavior beyond initial adoption, particularly in sustaining continued platform usage and shaping user satisfaction.

Pricing is another crucial factor influencing consumer decisions in the OFD market. The competitive nature of the industry has led to the widespread use of discounts, promotional offers, and dynamic pricing strategies. However, the effectiveness of these pricing mechanisms in fostering customer retention and brand loyalty remains uncertain. Some consumers may prioritize cost-effectiveness over other factors, while others may be willing to pay a premium for quality and reliability. Moreover, consumer perceptions of pricing fairness, transparency, and value for money play a significant role in determining their level of trust and engagement with OFD platforms. This study aims to explore how pricing strategies impact consumer behavior and whether they lead to long-term customer retention or merely drive short-term sales.

Service quality remains a critical determinant of customer satisfaction in the online food delivery ecosystem. The industry faces significant challenges in ensuring timely deliveries, maintaining food quality, minimizing order errors, and providing responsive customer service. Negative experiences related to late deliveries, incorrect orders, poor food quality, or unresponsive support can lead to customer dissatisfaction and platform abandonment. Moreover, consumer expectations regarding service quality may evolve over time, influenced by past experiences and competitor offerings. This research seeks to identify the key service quality attributes that drive consumer satisfaction and explore their impact on consumer decision-making in selecting and continuing to use specific OFD platforms.

The digital experience offered by online food delivery platforms plays a pivotal role in shaping user engagement and satisfaction. A seamless and intuitive user interface, secure payment options, real-time order tracking, and personalized recommendations contribute to the overall consumer experience. As digital transformation accelerates, consumers expect increasingly sophisticated and user-friendly platforms that cater to their individual preferences and behavioral patterns. However, the extent to which digital experience influences consumer perceptions and long-term usage behavior requires deeper analysis. This study will examine how various digital experience factors contribute to consumer decision-making and platform loyalty. Beyond these key themes, consumer decision-making processes in online food delivery remain complex and multifaceted. Psychological, cultural, and social factors influence how individuals choose between multiple OFD platforms, evaluate their experiences, and establish preferences. Word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, brand reputation, and personal past experiences significantly shape consumer choices. Additionally, with the rise of sustainability concerns, ethical considerations such as packaging waste, environmental impact, and responsible sourcing may also influence consumer decisions. The study aims to explore how these broader influences interact with key behavioral themes to provide a holistic understanding of consumer behavior in online food delivery.

Despite the vast body of research on e-commerce and digital consumer behavior, the specific nuances of the OFD market remain underexplored, particularly from a qualitative perspective. Much of the existing literature focuses on quantitative analyses, often overlooking the deeper, subjective experiences that drive consumer choices. By employing a qualitative thematic analysis, this study seeks to fill this research gap

by providing a more nuanced understanding of consumer perceptions, motivations, and decision-making patterns. The need to decode consumer behavior in online food delivery services has never been more pressing. As competition intensifies and consumer expectations evolve, OFD platforms must refine their strategies to enhance customer experiences, improve service quality, and foster long-term engagement. This study will provide valuable insights into the fundamental drivers of consumer behavior in this space, offering practical recommendations for businesses to optimize their services and better cater to consumer needs. By identifying and analyzing the key themes influencing consumer behavior, this research will contribute to both academic knowledge and industry practices, ultimately aiding in the development of more effective and consumer-centric online food delivery models.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify and analyze key themes influencing consumer behavior in online food delivery services, including factors such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience.
2. To explore consumer perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes when choosing online food aggregator platforms, using thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Literature Samples

In recent years, the online food delivery (OFD) industry has experienced significant growth, prompting extensive research into the factors influencing consumer behavior within this sector. This literature review examines five recent studies (2022–2024) that explore key themes such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience, as well as consumer perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes in choosing online food aggregator platforms.

Peng et al. (2024) address the complexities of service design in the OFD industry by introducing a service blueprint that maps the customer journey from browsing to after-sales services. Utilizing data collection, surveys, and statistical tools, the study identifies critical factors influencing customer experiences, including platform design, information quality, order accuracy, and delivery efficiency. The researchers employ machine learning techniques to align services with customer needs, culminating in a Quality Function Deployment (QFD) table that translates customer insights into actionable service design imperatives. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of integrating technological innovations with customer feedback to enhance service quality in the OFD sector.

Tran et al. (2024) explore the determinants influencing decision-making among OFD app users in Can Tho City, Vietnam. Through qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study identifies key factors such as convenience, trust, food quality, delivery time, price sensitivity, and social influences. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of user behavior, emphasizing that while convenience is a primary motivator, trust in both the platform and the restaurants, as well as perceptions of food quality and timely delivery, significantly impact consumer choices. This research provides valuable insights into the regional nuances of consumer behavior in the OFD market.

The 2024 Consumer Trends report by DoorDash offers an in-depth analysis of current dining habits and online ordering preferences in the United States. Based on a survey of 1,522 consumers, the report reveals that convenience remains the top reason for ordering food delivery, with 63% of consumers citing it as their primary motivation. The report also highlights generational differences, noting that Gen Z consumers are more likely to eat their delivery meals in unconventional settings, such as their beds. These insights underscore the evolving consumer expectations and the importance of convenience in driving the adoption

of OFD services.

Grand View Research (2024) provides a comprehensive market analysis of the global OFD services industry, estimating its size at USD 380.43 billion in 2024, with a projected growth rate of 9.0% from 2025 to 2030. The report attributes this growth to technological advancements, urbanization, and changing consumer lifestyles that prioritize convenience. It also discusses the impact of strategic partnerships between food delivery platforms and restaurants, the emergence of cloud kitchens, and the integration of advanced payment solutions. These factors collectively enhance the digital experience, offering consumers a wider array of choices and streamlined services, thereby influencing their decision-making processes.

Kim and Lee (2024) investigate the various types of value consumers experience with meal kit delivery services, a subset of the OFD industry. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study identifies five themes of consumer value: excellence, convenience, monetary value, epistemic value, and self-esteem. The quantitative analysis reveals that these values significantly influence customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth behaviors. The study also finds that demographic factors, such as marital status and household income, moderate the relationship between perceived value and satisfaction. These findings suggest that understanding the diverse value perceptions among different consumer segments is crucial for tailoring services to meet varied expectations.

Research Gap

While existing literature provides valuable insights into factors influencing consumer behavior in the OFD industry, several gaps remain. Firstly, there is a need for more region-specific studies that consider cultural, economic, and infrastructural differences affecting consumer preferences and decision-making processes. Secondly, the dynamic interplay between identified factors—such as how pricing strategies influence perceptions of service quality or how digital experience impacts trust—requires further exploration. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining how consumer behavior evolves with technological advancements and market maturation are limited. Addressing these gaps through qualitative thematic analyses can offer a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior, enabling OFD platforms to develop targeted strategies that enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Research Methodology

This study aims to analyze consumer behavior in online food delivery (OFD) services, focusing on key factors such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience. A **qualitative approach** using thematic analysis is employed to explore consumer perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes in selecting online food aggregator platforms.

Target Population

The target population for this study consists of consumers of online food delivery services in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. Coimbatore is a major urban hub with a rapidly expanding digital economy and a high penetration of online food aggregator platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, and Uber Eats. The study focuses on consumers who actively use these platforms, as they can provide relevant insights into their preferences, satisfaction levels, and decision-making processes.

Data Collection Mechanism

A qualitative data collection strategy is adopted to gain in-depth insights into consumer behavior. The

primary methods include:

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:**
o Individual interviews are conducted with selected respondents to explore their experiences, preferences, and challenges while using OFD services.
o Open-ended questions allow participants to elaborate on key decision-making factors, including convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience.

2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
o **Five FGDs** (each with 6–8 participants) are conducted to facilitate discussions on consumer perceptions and preferences regarding OFD services.
o Discussions focus on comparative experiences with different platforms, trust factors, and decision-making patterns.

3. **Consumer Digital Interaction Analysis:**
o With participant consent, engagement with OFD platforms is observed to understand browsing behavior, order history, and platform preferences.

4. **Survey Questionnaire (Supplementary Data):**
o A structured survey is conducted with 150 respondents to complement qualitative findings with quantifiable data.
o The questionnaire captures insights on frequency of use, platform preferences, and key decision-making factors.

5. **Secondary Data Collection:**
o Previous studies, industry reports, and consumer behavior models are reviewed to support primary data findings.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling approach is employed, targeting 150 respondents who have significant experience using OFD services. The sample is distributed across different demographics to ensure diverse representation:

Sample Distribution:
- 50 respondents participate in in-depth interviews.
- 40 respondents take part in five focus group discussions (FGDs).
- 60 respondents complete the supplementary survey.

Analyses

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18 – 25 years	45	30%
	26 – 35 years	50	33%
	36 – 45 years	35	23%
	Above 45 years	20	14%
Occupation	Students	40	27%
	Working Professionals	60	40%
	Business Owners	30	20%

	Homemakers	20	13%
Frequency of OFD Usage	Regular (Daily/Weekly)	65	43%
	Occasional (Monthly)	55	37%
	Rare Users	30	20%

- The majority of respondents (63%) belong to the 18–35 age group, indicating that younger consumers are more likely to use online food delivery services.
- Working professionals (40%) and students (27%) form the dominant consumer segments, suggesting that busy lifestyles influence OFD usage.
- 43% of consumers use OFD services regularly, highlighting a high dependency on these platforms for meals.

2. Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior in OFD

Key Factors	Highly Influential (%)	Moderately Influential (%)	Not Influential (%)
Convenience	80%	15%	5%
Pricing	65%	25%	10%
Service Quality	70%	20%	10%
Digital Experience	60%	30%	10%

- Convenience (80%) is the most significant factor influencing OFD choices, indicating that consumers prioritize time-saving and ease of ordering.
- Service quality (70%) and pricing (65%) also play critical roles, showing that affordability and food quality are major decision-making criteria.
- Digital experience (60%) is a growing factor, demonstrating the increasing importance of user-friendly apps and payment systems.

3. Consumer Preferences for OFD Platforms

Online Food Delivery Platform	Preferred by (%)	Reason for Preference
Swiggy	45%	Fast delivery, discount offers
Zomato	40%	Better customer service, UI
Uber Eats	10%	Brand trust, payment ease
Others	5%	Local food aggregators

- Swiggy (45%) is the most preferred platform due to fast delivery and attractive discounts.
- Zomato (40%) follows closely, with strong user satisfaction in terms of customer service and app interface.
- Uber Eats (10%) has a lower preference, indicating that local players dominate the market.

4. Challenges Faced by Consumers in OFD Services

Challenges	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
High Delivery Charges	60	40%
Late Delivery	50	33%
Poor Food Quality	30	20%
Technical/App Issues	10	7%

- 40% of consumers complain about high delivery charges, making affordability a key concern.

- Late delivery (33%) remains a significant issue, affecting overall customer satisfaction.
- 20% report food quality issues, indicating the need for better restaurant selection and quality control measures.

5. Thematic Analysis of Consumer Perceptions

Themes Identified	Key Consumer Insights
Convenience	"I use OFD because I don't have time to cook, and it's hassle-free."
Pricing	"I always look for discounts; without offers, it's too expensive."
Service Quality	"Timely delivery is important, but sometimes food is not fresh."
Digital Experience	"The app should be easy to use, and payments should be smooth."
Trust & Reviews	"I rely on customer ratings before ordering from a new restaurant."

- Convenience is the dominant theme, emphasizing the role of OFD services in fast-paced lifestyles.
- Pricing sensitivity is high, as consumers look for discounts and promotions.
- Digital experience plays a crucial role, as users prefer easy-to-navigate apps with secure payments.
- Trust in reviews influences decisions, indicating the power of customer feedback in shaping preferences.

Summary of findings

The analysis reveals that convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience are key drivers of consumer behavior in online food delivery services in Coimbatore. Consumers prefer platforms with fast delivery, better UI, and discount offers. However, high delivery charges and late deliveries remain critical challenges. Understanding these insights can help online food aggregators enhance service quality, improve affordability, and optimize digital interactions to better meet consumer expectations.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth exploration of consumer behavior in online food delivery (OFD) services in Coimbatore, focusing on key factors such as convenience, pricing, service quality, and digital experience. The findings reveal that convenience is the primary driver of OFD usage, with consumers valuing the ease and time-saving benefits of these platforms. Pricing also plays a crucial role, as many consumers actively seek discounts and offers, highlighting their price sensitivity. Service quality, including food freshness and delivery speed, significantly impacts customer satisfaction, with late deliveries and inconsistent food quality being major concerns. Additionally, the digital experience, including app usability, payment options, and customer support, influences platform preference, demonstrating the growing importance of seamless technology integration.

The study also identifies key challenges, such as high delivery charges, late deliveries, and technical issues, which affect consumer trust and satisfaction. To improve user experience, OFD platforms should focus on enhancing service efficiency, offering competitive pricing, and refining their digital interfaces. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for food delivery aggregators, policymakers, and restaurant partners, helping them align their strategies with evolving consumer preferences and expectations. Future research can explore emerging trends, such as AI-driven personalization and sustainability in food delivery services.

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