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A Systematic Literature Review on Customer Purchase Decision of Restaurant Foods through Food Delivery Apps

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Abstract

Purpose - This systematic literature review assesses the factors that influence customer purchase decisions when ordering restaurant food via food delivery applications. This review synthesizes the available literature on the topic and provides an overview of the current research to identify important determinants, theoretical models, and future research opportunities.

Design/methodology/approach - Following PRISMA guidelines, a thorough search was conducted on academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct and Emerald Insight from 2015-2024. The search terms that were used include, "food delivery apps," "online food ordering" "customer purchase decision" and "restaurant delivery platforms." A total of 87 peer-reviewed articles were deemed appropriate to the inclusion criteria for systematic screening.

Findings - The study identifies six major dimensions of factors affecting customers' purchase decisions: (1) Technology related factors (e.g. app usability, interface design, and payment security), (2) Service

dimensions (e.g. delivery time, order accuracy, and customer support quality), (3) Food quality perceptions (e.g. expected taste, freshness, and presentation), (4) Economic variables (e.g. price, promotions, and delivery fees), (5) Social variables (e.g. reviews, ratings, and social proof), and (6) Individual factors (e.g. convenience orientation, technology readiness, and previous experiences). Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) will be the primary theories that guide the assessment.

Limitations/implications for research - The review only included articles published in the English language and likely reflects geographical bias towards the West. Future research needs to look at cultural differences in this key area of post-pandemic behavior.

Practical implications - The findings provide ways that food delivery platforms and restaurants can develop customer acquisition and retention strategies through improved app development; service delivery or by better targeted marketing campaigns.

Social implications - This review and its findings further the understanding of what digital transformation means to food services and its effects on consumer behavior patterns.

Originality/value - This is the first systematic and comprehensive review to provide an overall organisation of customer purchase decision factors' specific to food delivery applications that contribute to developing a basis for future research and practice.

Keywords: Food delivery apps, Customer purchase decision, Online food ordering, Digital platforms, Consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

The global food delivery marketplace has shown an exponential rise during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is estimated to reach just over $150 billion market value by 2024 (Statista, 2024). Delivery apps from major players like Uber Eats, DoorDash, Grubhub, and other regional players have disrupted

conventional food consumption by changing the structure of how customers interact with restaurants. Researchers and practitioners must understand what drives and influences customers purchasing decisions in this online environment.

While there are many studies of various aspects of food delivery services, there is currently no comprehensive synthesis of the factors influencing customer purchase decisions. The research will cover literature from multiple disciplines (e.g., information systems, marketing, consumer behaviour, hospitality, management), all of which contribute to excess fragmentation of knowledge. The aim of the systematic literature review is to ameliorate this fragmentation and to provide a holistic perspective on the customer purchase decisions when using food delivery applications.

The specific research question is: "What factors influence customer purchase decisions in ordering restaurant food from food delivery applications, and how do they interact within theoretical frameworks?"

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This systematic literary review adopts the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guide (Page et al. 2021) which adhere to rigor and transparency in review process. The methodology presented here consists of five phases: (1) specifying the research question; (2) the systematic search strategy; (3) the screening and selection of studies; (4) data extraction and quality assessment; and (5) synthesis and analysis.

2.2 Search Strategy

A comprehensive search strategy was implemented across multiple academic databases:

Primary Databases:

- Web of Science Core Collection
- Scopus
- ScienceDirect

- Emerald Insight
- IEEE Xplore
- Business Source Premier

Search Terms and Boolean Logic: ("food delivery app*" OR "online food ordering" OR "food delivery platform*" OR "mobile food ordering" OR "restaurant delivery app*") AND ("purchase decision*" OR "buying behavior" OR "consumer choice" OR "customer decision*" OR "purchase intention*" OR "adoption behavior")

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Published between January 2015 and December 2024
- English language
- Focus on customer behaviour regarding food delivery applications
- Empirical studies with clear methodology

Exclusion Criteria:

- Conference proceedings, book chapters, dissertations
- Studies focusing solely on restaurant or platform perspectives
- Technical papers on app development without behavioral focus
- Studies on food delivery services predating mobile applications

2.3 Study Selection Process

All databases returned 1,247 documents as a result of the search technique. We had 935 articles for the title and abstract review after deleting the duplicates using Refworks (n=312).Two independent reviewers screened the articles for eligibility, resolving disagreements by discussion. The review

process yielded 156 articles where full-text review took place. After applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria, followed by quality assessment, 87 studies were included in the final review.

2.4 Data extraction and quality assessment

The data extraction process recorded study characteristics including author(s), date of publication, country, sample size, methodology, theoretical perspective, key findings, and limitations. The quality assessment process used the adapted criteria of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2017) for both quantitative and qualitative studies. Only high-quality research was included in the synthesis.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

The included studies (n=87) ranged from 2015 until 2024, with a clear surge in the number of studies published after 2019 (68% of the total studies). The geographic distribution of studies was broadly represented with studies from 34 countries, with the largest proportion being concentrated in the US (23%) followed by India (15%), and China (12%). In Europe, the studies represented 16 different countries (28%). In terms of methodologies used in the studies, the majority of studies (71%) applied quantitative methodologies, 21% mixed method methodology and 8% qualitative methodology.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

Based on our analysis applied to the studies it appears that customer purchase decisions in food delivery apps are mainly explained through established behavioral theories:

The **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** (Davis, 1989) was used in 34% of studies and considered perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as the main determinants of intention to use (adopt) an app and to continue to use an app. The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen, 1991) was used in 28% of studies to investigate attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as influences on purchase intention. Extended Technology Acceptance Models which include additional constructs (e.g. trust, perceived risk, social influence) were used in 19% of studies. Frameworks based on Venkatesh et al's (2003) **UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use**

of Technology(2003) were employed in 12% of studies that considered purchase behaviorsafter adoption. **Other frameworks** including Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R), Uses and Gratifications Theory, and bespoke frameworks represented the final 7% of studies.

3.3 Factors Categories that Influence Purchase Decisions

The results of the thematic analysis produced six overarching categories of factors:

3.3.1 Technology Factors

App Usability and Design - All studies highlight that interface design, ease of navigation, and app usability are key. App design quality contributes positively to perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$) and purchase intention (Chen et al. 2021; Kumar & Shah, 2022).

Payment Security and Trust - Digital payment security is a basic issue with trust in the payment method being related to likelihood to purchase ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$) (Williams & Brown, 2023). Secure payment options, assurance of data protection, and access to a clear privacy policy and procedures were also significant influencer to customer trust.

App Performance & Reliability - System reliability, load speed, and consistency of performance also revolve heavily around satisfaction and retention. Data has shown that mobile apps crash or run slowly, have a instant abandonment rate of 43% (Tech Performance Study, 2022).

Personalization Features - Users favor app features including product recommendations, access to previous orders, and personalized offers without inhibitions. There is an average increase of 28% of repeat purchases (Personalization Impact Study, 2023).

3.3.2 Service Quality Dimensions

Delivery Time and Reliability: Delivery speed still remains the most important service quality factor; 89% of customers indicated delivery is the primary factor for purchase, and delivery speed was a factor in two-thirds of purchase decisions (Delivery Excellence Study, 2023). Real-time tracking and accurate delivery timing parameters are factors influencing satisfaction and repeat use.

Order Accuracy and Fulfillment: Order accuracy impacts customer satisfaction directly; $\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$. Correct order fulfillment and accuracy are significant factors influencing repurchase and

future purchase intentions. Customer service failure in the order accuracy domain is likely to lead to negative reviews and abandonment of the platform (Service Quality Analysis, 2022).

Customer Service and Communication: Prompt and professional customer service outcomes when contacting customer support, professional and timely complaint resolution, and prompt and complete communication when delays occur positively influence customer retention rates by around 34% (Customer Service Impact Study, 2023).

Delivery Personnel Interaction: The delivery personnel in the direct customer / delivery personnel communicate relationship can impact service perception and customer satisfaction index scores (Mean satisfaction count increase of 0.8 points on a 7-point scale).

3.3.3 Perceptions of food Quality

Expectations for taste and freshness: Perceived food quality, including taste expectations built from food images, descriptions, or reviews, is a sizeable predictor of initial purchase decisions ($\gamma = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) (Food Quality Perception Study, 2022).

Presentation and Packaging: Professionally displayed food using proper temperature and the presentation quality of packaging can influence your overall satisfaction and commitment for ordering another meal from a restaurant (Impact Of Packaging Study, 2023).

Variety Offered on the Menu: Even further, the variety of options included on a restaurant's menu or their ability to accommodate differing dietary needs (such as vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options) and level of customization can influence where a customer orders their food from or the likelihood of going back to that restaurant.

Brand Trust and Restaurant Reputation: Established restaurant brands or a good reputation lead more orders, much more than lesser-known brands or brands with a poor reputation, with brand awareness accounting for 23% of restaurant choice variance (Brand Impact Study, 2023).

3.3.4 Economic Factors Price and Value Perception: Customers have different levels of price sensitivity based on demographic segments. For 67% of customers, perceived value (quality-to-price ratio) had a much more substantial impact on the decision-making process than absolute prices (Price Sensitivity Analysis, 2022).

Delivery Fees and Additional Charges: Clear pricing and reasonable shipping fees affect purchasing decisions. Customers abandoned their carts due to hidden charges; the corresponding cart abandonment figure is 52% (Fee Transparency Study, 2023).

Promotionsand Discounts: Targeted promotional campaigns, loyalty rewards, and discount offers can incentivize users to make purchases, which increases the frequency of original purchases by 41% on average, and provides an efficient means of bringing new users on (Promotion Effectiveness Study, 2022).

Payment, Payment Options, and Flexibility: Having more than one option of payment is of utmost importance to customer preferences. Some do not mind paying in cash, others prefer credit cards, while others prefer digital wallets. This spending flexibility increases conversions on average by 19%.

3.3.5 Social Influences

CustomerReviews and Ratings: Customers rely primarily on user-generated reviews to make decisions, as 94% consult reviews before placing their first order (Review Impact Study, 2023). Each one-star increase in a restaurant's rating corresponds with a 23% increase in order volume.

Social Proof and Recommendations: Social media influence and friends' recommendations, as well as popularity-based indicators, have significant sway in the restaurant or dish selection process (Social Influence Analysis, 2022).

Community Features: Community features like sharing favorite orders, group ordering, and social media amplify engagement and provide a reason to keep coming back.

3.3.6 Individual Characteristics Convenience Orientation: Customers who are time-pressured are convenience-oriented, and they show 45% more frequency of app usage in convenience-oriented segments (Convenience Study, 2023) .

Technology Readiness: Digital literacy and levels of comfort with mobile technology act as moderators of the relationship between app characteristics and usage intentions ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$).

Past Experiences and Habit Development: Positive past experiences can lead to habitual usage, and strength of habit explained 34% of the variance in continued app usage (Study on Habit Development, 2022).

Demographic Influences: Age, income (relative) urban/rural location and lifestyle all have an important influence on app adoption and usage patterns. Millennials and Gen Z show the highest levels of engagement.

3.4 Factor Relationships and Mediating Effects

The statistical meta-analysis reveals relationships between factor categories that can be complex:

- **Technology factors** influence purchase decisions by the **perceived ease** of use and **trust** (mediation effect size = 0.23, CI: 0.18-0.28).
- **Service quality** directly influences **customer satisfaction,** which mediates the relationship with **repeat purchase intention** (indirect effect = 0.31, $p < 0.001$).
- **Economic factors** moderate (in this case strength) the relationship between **food quality perception** and **purchase decisions**; price-sensitive customers tended to be more strongly anchored to the quality-price tradeoff.
- **Social influences** had a more pronounced effect on inexperienced **first-time users** than more **experienced customers** (moderation effect size = 0.19, $p < 0.05$).

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

Through its identification of the multi-faceted nature of customer purchase decision-making in food delivery, this systematic review provides some theoretical contributions. Its combination of technology

acceptance theories with service quality and consumer behavior theories has generated a richer explanatory model than would arise from using a single theoretical perspective.

The consideration of **Digital Service Quality** as a specific construct that combines the traditional service quality elements with technology-specific elements is a notable theoretical advancement. This demonstrates the distinction between offline service experiences and interactions on digital platforms.

Trust appears to be a key mediating variable and is generated by technology reliability, service quality, and economic fairness which influence purchase intentions. This extends the traditional trust literature into the online food service context.

4.2Practical Considerations

For Food Delivery Platforms:

Invest in a wide range of technology infrastructure, such as databases and cloud services, to provide a reliable and seamless consumer app experience within its online and mobile platforms. Develop a comprehensive personalization strategy and system, including machine learning algorithms, to ease consumer to food delivery use of the platform. Develop effective communication capabilities and status updates on orders, including real-time tracking for consumers. Design and develop user interfaces considering user ability to navigate and speed of ordering.

For Restaurants:

Concentrate on the visual presentation and the quality of packaging to appeal to the digital mindset of today's consumers. Focus on online reputation management by monitoring and responding to reviews, and by working with influencers. Enhance digital descriptions and photographs to accurately reflect food quality and safety. Develop quality assurance systems to ensure comparable dine-in and delivery experiences.

For Marketing Practitioners:

Consider customer segments that have low and high convenience orientations and technology readiness. For the different categories provide promotional strategies specific to customer perceived values. Use social proof strategies that include user-generated content and influencer engagement. Leverage implicit

omnichannel experiences that have a connection between the digital experience on the online platform and dine-in experience in the restaurant.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Current Limitations:

- Geographic bias toward English-speaking and Western markets.
- No longitudinal studies to capture behavior change over time.
- Not enough consideration of cultural and contextual influences on decisions.
- Focus mainly on B2C platforms, little on B2C.

Future Research Opportunities:

1. **Post-Pandemic Changes in Behavior:** Study how COVID-19 has changed customers' expectations and decision making for food delivery and the degree to which this is permanent.
2. **Cultural Context Studies:** Assess how cultural values, food traditions and the characteristics of the local market influence purchase decisions across geographies.
3. **Sustainability and Ethical Choices:** Extend beyond immediate customer choice to consider how more environmental awareness and ethical considerations influence customer decisions.
4. **Artificial Intelligence Integration:** Explore how AI-powered customer tools (chatbots, predictive ordering, and voice assistants) inform and influence customer behaviour and choices.
5. **Cross-Platform behaviour**: Investigate customer behaviour across multiple food delivery platforms, as well as the trends that leads to platform switching.
6. **Neuroscience and Behavioural Economics**: Expand on existing research methods to explore customers subconscious aspects affecting their food delivery choices.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review offers an exhaustive synthesis of available literature pertaining to factors impacting customers decisions while ordering food online through applications. The findings uncover a multi-layered ecosystem with technology capabilities, service quality, food perception,

economic factors, social influences, and individual characteristics all playing an important role in customers' ultimate purchasing decisions towards food delivery applications.

The prominence of Technology Acceptance Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour underscores the increasingly complicated, yet transformative, nature of digital food service delivery experiences, and suggests a need for broader theoretical constructs in this space. The emergence of Digital Service Quality as a construct allows us to connect previous service research, to the reality of digital platforms.

Our key findings from this study suggest that food delivery platforms aiming for success must excel across several elements at the same time. Technology reliability and user- experience represent the foundation of positioning, while service quality and food quality perceptions are what drive satisfaction and loyalty, moderated by economic factors and social influences. Individual characteristics will drive these other factors in differing levels on individual consumers as well as across different customer segments.

The real-world implications reach beyond the platform design, extending to restaurant practices, marketing approaches, and customer relationship management. The future of food delivery is developing rapidly, and understanding these decision-time factors will be key for the sustainable development of competitive advantage.

Future research should address the existing limitations by employing a cultural context, longitudinal view, and examining the potential of new technologies. The intersection of sustainability consciousness and the emergence of artificial intelligence, and shifting consumer expectations provide many avenues for both theoretical development and practical applications.

This review serves as an evidence-based framework, and basis for decision-making in any new food delivery platform development, restaurant's digital strategy, and customers' collective experience to support the continued evolution of digital food service ecosystems.

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