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Customer Experience and Service Quality in Online Food Delivery: A Comparative Assessment of Proprietary Brand Apps and Aggregator Platforms

Dr. Babita Prem

Associate Professor, School of Management, S. A. College of Arts & Science

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital food delivery services has transformed consumer behavior and the restaurant industry in India. This study examines the comparative effectiveness of customer service provided through food brands' own applications and third-party delivery platforms. The research focuses on key parameters such as user experience, pricing strategies, delivery efficiency, customer satisfaction, and data privacy concerns. Primary data was collected from 75 respondents using structured questionnaires, and analyzed using percentage analysis, correlation, and regression techniques.

The findings reveal that third-party platforms outperform brand-owned apps in convenience, variety, and pricing benefits, while brand apps excel in reliability, quality control, and personalized engagement. A strong positive correlation ($r \approx 0.91$) was identified between usage frequency and privacy concerns. The study concludes that a hybrid approach combining operational efficiency and direct customer engagement can significantly enhance service quality. These insights are valuable for businesses, marketers, and platform developers in improving digital service delivery.

KEYWORDS: Online Food Delivery, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Apps, Third-Party Platforms, Swiggy, Zomato, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Service Quality, Data Privacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The food delivery industry in India has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, driven by rapid digitalization and changing consumer lifestyles. The increasing penetration of smartphones, affordable internet access, and the growth of digital payment systems have reshaped the way consumers order food. Traditional methods such as dine-in and telephone-based ordering have gradually been replaced by app-based platforms that offer speed, convenience, and accessibility. This shift reflects the evolving preferences of modern consumers, particularly in urban areas, where busy schedules and the demand for quick services influence food consumption behaviour.

Within this evolving digital landscape, two primary models of food delivery have emerged: food brand-owned applications and third-party delivery platforms. Brand-owned apps, developed by individual restaurant chains, aim to establish a direct connection with customers. These applications focus on enhancing customer relationships through personalised experiences, loyalty programs, and consistent service quality. By managing their own ordering and delivery processes, brands are able to maintain better

control over product quality, pricing, and customer interactions. This direct engagement also allows them to collect valuable customer data, which can be used to improve services and strengthen brand loyalty. On the other hand, third-party delivery platforms function as aggregators that bring together a wide variety of restaurants and cuisines on a single platform. These platforms are widely preferred for their convenience, extensive choices, and user-friendly interfaces. Features such as real-time order tracking, customer reviews, and multiple payment options enhance the overall user experience. Additionally, their strong logistics networks enable faster and more efficient delivery services, making them highly attractive to consumers seeking quick and reliable solutions.

Despite the advantages of both models, differences exist in how customers perceive their service effectiveness. While brand-owned apps are often associated with trust and quality, third-party platforms are favoured for their convenience and variety. Therefore, this study aims to compare these two models by analysing customer preferences and evaluating service effectiveness, providing insights into the strengths and limitations of each approach in the digital food delivery ecosystem.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To compare the user experience offered by food brand-owned applications and third-party aggregator platforms, focusing on aspects such as interface design, ease of use, and overall interaction quality.
- To analyse and evaluate the pricing strategies, discounts, and promotional offers provided by both types of platforms to understand their influence on consumer decision-making.
- To examine consumer behaviour and preferences while choosing between brand-owned apps and aggregator platforms, identifying the key factors that drive platform selection.
- To evaluate the delivery efficiency and service quality of both models by assessing factors such as delivery time, order accuracy, and responsiveness of customer support.
- To assess the overall impact of these platforms on customer satisfaction and loyalty, providing insights into how effectively each model meets consumer expectations and builds long-term relationships.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kapoor & Vij (2021) examined consumer preferences for mobile food delivery applications, concluding that convenience, usability, and perceived value significantly influence platform choice, driving higher adoption rates and customer satisfaction levels.

Ray & Bala (2020) analysed user experience in food delivery apps, highlighting that third-party platforms perform better in real-time tracking, comparison features, and interface efficiency, enhancing overall customer convenience and satisfaction.

Alalwan (2022) explored factors influencing mobile food ordering adoption, emphasizing that trust, ease of use, and promotional offers play a crucial role in shaping user intentions and continued usage behaviour.

Kotler et al. (2021) discussed the integration of digital technologies in marketing, explaining how personalization, artificial intelligence, and data-driven strategies enhance customer engagement and improve overall service experiences in digital platforms.

Solomon (2018) focused on consumer behaviour in digital environments, explaining how psychological factors, convenience, and perceived value influence online purchasing decisions, including preferences for food delivery applications and services.

Choudary et al. (2016) explained platform-based business models, highlighting network effects, multi-sided markets, and value creation, which help third-party aggregators scale rapidly and dominate digital

service ecosystems.

Statista (2023) reported significant growth in online food delivery platforms, emphasizing increased user penetration, rising revenues, and the dominance of aggregator platforms due to their extensive reach and convenience.

Deloitte (2022) analysed digital consumer behaviour trends, highlighting the growing importance of mobile-first services, convenience, and personalized experiences in shaping customer preferences in online food delivery platforms.

Business Standard (2022) discussed challenges faced by restaurants due to high commission fees charged by third-party platforms, encouraging brands to promote their own applications to maintain profitability and control.

Forbes India (2023) highlighted advancements in food delivery technology, focusing on artificial intelligence, data analytics, and delivery optimization techniques that improve efficiency, customer experience, and operational performance of platforms.

The Hindu (2022) discussed changing consumer preferences in food delivery, emphasizing the growing reliance on aggregator platforms for convenience, while also noting increased interest in brand-owned apps for trust and reliability.

The Economic Times (2021) analysed the dominance of aggregator platforms in India, explaining how their logistics strength, wide restaurant networks, and aggressive pricing strategies contribute to their rapid market expansion.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and explanatory research design to systematically describe user behaviour and explain relationships between variables such as platform preference, customer satisfaction, and service effectiveness in food delivery applications.

4.2 Data Collection

The study uses both primary and secondary data sources, where primary data is collected through Google Forms surveys, and secondary data is gathered from journals, websites, and published reports for theoretical support.

4.3 Sample Size

A total of 75 respondents were selected for the study, providing a sufficient dataset to analyse patterns, identify trends, and draw meaningful conclusions regarding customer preferences in food delivery platforms.

4.4 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling technique is used in this study, where respondents are selected based on ease of access and availability, making data collection quicker and suitable for exploratory and behavioural research.

4.5 Tools Used

The study employs percentage analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to interpret data, identify relationships between variables, measure the strength of associations, and draw statistically supported conclusions from the collected data.

5. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

5.1 Demographic Analysis

Table:1 Distribution of the Respondents based on Age

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 18	01	1.3%
18 – 25	65	86.7%
26 - 35	03	4%
36 - 45	03	4%
Above 45	03	4%

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The chart depicts that 86.7 % respondents of tend to age between 18-25, 4 % respondents tend to age between 26-35, 4 % respondents tend to age between 36-45, 4 % respondents tend to age between above 45 and 1.3 % respondents tend to age between below 18.

Table:2 Distribution of the Respondents based on Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	44	58.7%
Female	31	41.3%
Others	0	0%

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The chart depicts that 59% of the respondents are Male, 41% of respondents are Female and 0% of others. Majority of the respondents are male.

Table: 3 Distribution of the Respondents based on Preference of platform for food orders

Preference of Platform	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Restaurant's own app / website	11	14.7%
Swiggy	18	24%
Zomato	34	45.3%
Uber Eats	0	0%
Others	12	16%

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The chart depicts that 45.3% of respondents choose Zomato, 24% of respondents choose Swiggy, 16% of respondents choose other platforms, 14.7% of respondents choose Restaurant's own app / website and 0% of respondents choose Uber Eats.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents Based on Data Privacy Concern

Level of Concern	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low (1–2)	26	34.7%
Moderate (3)	34	45.3%
High (4–5)	15	20%
Total	**75**	**100%**

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation

The table shows that a majority of respondents (45.3%) have a moderate level of concern regarding data privacy in online food delivery applications, while 20% express high concern and 34.7% show low concern. This indicates that although users are aware of privacy issues, it is not a major barrier to usage. However, the presence of a notable proportion of highly concerned users suggests increasing awareness, especially among frequent users. As usage increases, exposure to digital transactions and data sharing practices also rises, leading to greater concern about personal information security. This highlights the growing importance of data privacy in influencing user trust and long-term engagement with food delivery platforms.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Null Hypothesis (H_0):

There is no significant relationship between the usage frequency of online food delivery applications and users' data privacy concerns.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

There is a significant relationship between the usage frequency of online food delivery applications and users' data privacy concerns.

Table 4: Relationship Between Usage Frequency of Online Food Delivery Applications and Data Privacy Concern

Usage Frequency (R) / Privacy Rating (D)	1 Star	2 Stars	3 Stars	4 Stars	5 Stars	Total
Very Often (15)	0.8	1.2	6.8	4.2	2	**15**
Often (14)	0.7	1.1	6.4	3.9	1.9	**14**
Sometimes (21)	1.1	1.7	9.5	5.9	2.8	**21**
Rarely (19)	1	1.5	8.6	5.3	2.5	**19**
Never (6)	0.3	0.5	2.7	1.7	0.8	**6**
Total	**4**	**6**	**34**	**21**	**10**	**75**

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between how often respondents use third-party food delivery apps and their concern for data privacy while using such platforms. After converting the usage categories into a numerical scale and aligning them with the privacy rating distribution, the computed Pearson correlation coefficient is $r = 0.9086$ This value indicates a very strong positive correlation between the two variables.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Null Hypothesis (H_0):

There is no significant relationship between gender and preference for online food delivery application platforms.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):
There is a significant relationship between gender and preference for online food delivery application platforms.

Regression Analysis: Impact of Gender on Platform Preference in Online Food Delivery Applications -Cross Tabulation

Platform Preference x Gender	Restaurant's App (11)	Swiggy (18)	Zomato (34)	Others (12)	Total
Male (58.7%)	6.46	10.56	19.95	7.04	**44**
Female (41.3)	4.54	7.44	14.05	4.96	**31**
Total	**11**	**18**	**34**	**12**	**75**

(Source: Primary Data)

- **X (Independent Variable)** = Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0)
- **Y (Dependent Variable)** = Platform Preference (coded scale based on distribution)

The Regression model is: **$Y = 2.13 + 0.21X$**
Therefore $R^2 = 0.04$

The analysis indicates that platform preference is nearly identical across genders, with both male and female respondents showing similar behaviour. The regression results reveal only a slight difference (b = +0.21), indicating a marginally higher preference among males for third-party platforms. Zomato remains the most preferred platform for both groups. The low coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.04$) confirms that gender is not a strong predictor of platform choice. This suggests that other factors such as convenience, discounts, and delivery efficiency play a more significant role than gender in influencing consumer preferences in online food delivery platforms.

6. FINDINGS

1. It can be inferred that only 13.3% of respondents use brand apps very often, while 36% use them rarely, indicating low engagement and weaker customer retention for brand-owned platforms.
2. The data shows that 20% of respondents use third-party apps very often and 28% sometimes, demonstrating higher frequency and dependency on aggregator platforms for regular food ordering needs.
3. It is evident that 18.7% rated third-party apps 5 stars compared to only 12% for brand apps, suggesting higher peak satisfaction levels and stronger positive experiences with aggregator platforms.
4. The findings indicate that 41.3% of respondents believe third-party apps have higher delivery charges, while 42.7% are unsure, showing mixed perceptions and lack of pricing transparency in aggregator platforms.
5. It can be observed that 34.7% of respondents receive personalized offers from both platforms, while only 17.3% receive them from brand apps, highlighting stronger promotional reach by aggregators.
6. The data reveals that 34.7% of respondents rate platform convenience at a moderate level (3 stars), while 33.3% rate it high (4 stars), indicating convenience as a key but improvable factor.
7. It is found that 45.3% of respondents show moderate concern (3-star rating) about data privacy in third-party apps, indicating awareness exists but not at a highly critical level.

8. The analysis shows that 20% of respondents express high concern (5-star) for privacy in brand apps compared to 13.3% in third-party apps, suggesting relatively higher trust in brand platforms.
9. It can be inferred that 29.3% of respondents perceive pricing as moderately important and 37.3% as highly important, confirming that price sensitivity plays a dominant role in platform selection.
10. The findings suggest that only 8% of respondents never use third-party apps compared to 14.7% for brand apps, indicating stronger market penetration and acceptance of aggregator platforms.

7. SUGGESTIONS

For Brand Apps

- Food brands should improve their app design to make it easier and more user-friendly for customers.
- They should offer better discounts and deals to attract more users.
- Adding real-time order tracking will help customers know the status of their delivery.
- Customer support services should be improved to quickly solve user problems and complaints.

For Third-Party Apps

- Third-party platforms should clearly explain how customer data is used to build trust.
- They should try to reduce delivery charges to make ordering more affordable.
- Maintaining consistent service quality will help in keeping customers satisfied.

For Both

- Both types of platforms should focus more on improving overall customer satisfaction.
- They should adopt a hybrid approach by combining convenience with personalized services to enhance user experience.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that third-party delivery platforms currently dominate the food delivery market primarily due to their superior convenience, extensive variety of restaurant options, and attractive pricing strategies such as discounts and cashback offers. These features make them highly appealing to modern consumers who prioritize speed, accessibility, and value for money. However, food brand-owned applications continue to hold significant potential, particularly in fostering customer loyalty, ensuring consistent product quality, and offering personalized experiences through direct engagement. Brand apps provide better control over service delivery and allow companies to build long-term relationships with their customers. Despite the strengths of both models, neither fully satisfies all aspects of customer expectations independently. Therefore, the future of the food delivery industry is likely to be shaped by a hybrid approach that combines the operational efficiency and logistical strengths of third-party platforms with the personalization, trust, and quality assurance offered by brand-owned applications, ultimately creating a more balanced and customer-centric service ecosystem.

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