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## FOOD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: A REVIEW OF ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES

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### Abstract:

This paper reviews the definitions of online food delivery services (OFDs) and customer intention to use them by examining their rapid growth in developed and emerging nations. Digital platforms (websites or mobile applications) that facilitate food ordering and delivery through electronic commerce (e-commerce), with far-reaching implications on food consumption patterns. These services fall under restaurant-to-consumer and platform-to-consumer delivery models. Meanwhile, customer intention to use OFDs implies the influence of price value, convenience, service quality, and user experience on one's preparedness to use the platforms. The global significance and prevalence of OFDs is irrefutable following the unanticipated emergence of COVID-19. Nevertheless, OFD businesses must strive to accommodate varying consumer needs. These platforms can only be effectively sustained with a sound understanding of the key catalysts for customer purchase intention. From a social perspective, the OFDs have redefined consumers' dining habits, urban mobility, and community interactions. Such far-reaching implications warrant further

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95-102. drawbacks.

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## Introduction

### *Overview of OFDs*

A significant number of people have taken to ordering food through digital platforms following the advent of e-commerce. Yeo et al. (2017) revealed that restaurants have begun launching their own websites for direct customer orders and simplified ordering processes, which denotes a transition from traditional offline operations to mobile applications (Ray et al., 2019). Owing to financial or operational constraints, most restaurants resort to third-party OFD platforms in place of handling their own delivery services (Hwang et al., 2020). These independently operating services possess the necessary food delivery resources and bear no affiliation with the participating restaurants. They partner with multiple restaurants across a broad geographical area to widen their customer base (Williams et al., 2020). Notably, the OFDs convenient and varied dining options render them a popular choice.

Developed nations akin to the United States and the United Kingdom have well-established OFDs attribute to technological progress and the prevalent use of mobile applications. By 2019, the number of OFD users in the United States had surged to 95 million (Kee et al., 2021). The global revenue from OFDs reported by Statista (2021) is projected to reach \$151.5 billion by 2024. Following Buettner et al. (2023), American and English consumers tend to use OFDs to order from restaurants and fast-food businesses. More than 70% of GrubHub users reportedly used OFDs to buy pizza, fries, and nachos. In line with Stephens et al. (2020), digital ordering services resembling GrubHub, DoorDash, and UberEATS generated \$26.8 billion in revenue from smartphones. The use of OFDS in the United Kingdom rose from 19% to 28% in 2018 and 2021, respectively. Their counterparts in the United States reflected an increase from 17% to 21% during this period (Gupta et al., 2024). Keeble et al.'s (2020) analysis of OFD usage across Australia, Canada, Mexico, the UK, and the USA revealed that 15% of the UK

respondents used these services. Mexico reported the highest prevalence of 26%. Essentially, the frequency of usage was higher among individuals with children.

Malaysia is an emerging nation that has experienced rapid growth in its OFD market, specifically during COVID-19. Launched in 2018 and 2012, respectively, GrabFood and Foodpanda have exerted a significant influence on consumer behavior through diverse food selection. The local OFD market contributed to USD 192 million in revenue in 2020, with an estimated annual growth rate of 13.1% from 2021 to 2024 (Yeo et al., 2021), following the high demand for convenience, technology advancements, and the emergence of e-commerce. A similar situation is perceived in the Indonesian OFD market landscape. As reported by Badan Pusat Statistik (2019), the country ranked 10th in the international market, with a 78% rise in e-commerce activity due to increased consumer purchasing power, internet access, and technological literacy (Sugiharto et al., 2024).

Indonesian GO-JEK's Go-Food is a leading food delivery service encompassing 300,000 registered (primarily SME) food merchants (Fauzi, 2019). Driven by technological innovations and changing consumer habits, the rapid growth of OFDs in both the countries denote the OFD's evolving market in Southeast Asia. Consumer purchase intention is a key contributor to expanding the Malaysian and Indian OFD services. As such, platform sustainability is contingent upon one's level of understanding regarding customer purchase intention in OFD services. The following section elaborates on the definitions of OFDs.

### ***Definition of OFDs***

Consumers have used OFD systems to order food from restaurants or fast-food outlets (Elvandari et al., 2018) with greater flexibility (Pigatto et al., 2017). As described by Tran and Tran (2020) OFDs are digital systems used to seek preferred or nearby restaurants, browse menus, place orders, and await delivery to the specified location. Wang and Liang (2021) characterized OFDs as processes in which customers select restaurants and order food through websites or mobile applications. The restaurant receives the order (post-payment) and prepares the food. Subsequently, a delivery partner is notified to collect and deliver the meal to the customer. In line with Chan and Gao (2021), internet-based OFDs allow customers to order food for delivery based on two categories: (i) restaurant-to-consumer delivery and (ii) platform-to-consumer delivery.

Ambad et al. (2022) proposed that OFDs include food purchasing through web-based applications. Building on this statement, D'lima and De Melo (2022) elaborated that internet-based food ordering and website or mobile application-oriented delivery platforms facilitate customers' connection with partner restaurants. Likewise, Hong et al. (2023) defined OFDs as the website or mobile application systems linking partner restaurants to customers for food order and delivery. Aini et al. (2023) described OFDs as applications that allow customers to order food from restaurants or online food platforms.

Parallel to Rapariya (2023), added that platforms akin to Zomato, Foodpanda, and Swiggy facilitate the ordering and delivery process as intermediaries between customers and restaurants. Consumers can choose from various restaurants, place orders online, and receive meals at their doorstep in a specified duration. As defined by Gupta et al. (2024), OFDs are platforms that enable meal-ordering for delivery or pickup through digital interfaces. Line et al. (2024) elaborated that these services allow customers to receive food orders via mobile

applications or websites. The OFD operations and regional differences in market dynamics, technological infrastructure, and consumer behavior must be seriously considered to gauge its impact and functionality.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, OFD businesses must strive to accommodate varying consumer needs and maintain a competitive edge in the current market by comprehending the factors influencing customer purchase intention. On social grounds, OFDs have redefined consumer experiences in terms of dining habits, urban mobility, and community interactions. Nevertheless, differences in digital infrastructure, economic conditions, and consumer preferences lead to variances in the growth and adoption of OFDs in developed and developing countries. The unforeseen emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the global adoption of OFDs, underscoring their importance in the food service industry. Such notable implications require an in-depth investigation of the evolution of e-commerce and the widespread adoption of OFDs to analyze current food consumption patterns.

## **Implications To Researchers and Practitioners**

Researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the online food delivery framework can lay the groundwork for rigorously analyzing various elements of consumer behavior, market dynamics, technological innovations, and socio-economic impacts. A well-constructed online food delivery concept assists in developing pertinent research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies, generating robust and meaningful outcomes.

A standardized online food delivery definition supports effective meta-analyses and the identification of overarching trends in the field, thus promoting consistency and comparability across different studies. Researchers from different backgrounds can effectively collaborate via interdisciplinary research. A shared conceptual understanding improves the quality of individual studies while advancing the current body of literature on online food delivery. The research scope in the food service industry can be narrowed down with a concise definition of online food deliveries, determining which aspects of the services pertain to (or extend beyond) their subject matter. Such demarcations allow researchers to focus on specific online food delivery elements, such as technological platforms, consumer behavior, restaurant operations, or delivery logistics.

User experience (UX) research in online food deliveries offers key insights into user adoption patterns, usage behaviors, and preferences to determine their purchasing decisions, service loyalty, and expectations. The data-driven insights are key to forecasting market trends, changes in consumer preferences, and implementing strategies to gain a competitive edge. For example, online food delivery service providers can develop user-driven platforms that address changing consumer demands, optimize their user interfaces, streamline the ordering process, and personalize recommendations based on individual preferences and past behaviors.

Besides, UX researchers can identify key areas for improvement in user interfaces and ordering processes, such as simplifying navigation, decreasing the number of steps required to place an order, featuring intuitive search and filtering options, improving real-time order tracking, optimizing communication with restaurants and delivery personnel, and facilitating efficient management of customer feedback and complaints to increase customer loyalty, user

experience, and repeat business. In a competitive market, augmented reality for menu visualization or voice-activated ordering can be used to distinguish online food delivery platforms.

A precise definition facilitates researchers to examine the role of artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) in optimizing online food deliveries and user experience. AI algorithms improve route planning, predict demand patterns, and personalize customer recommendations for increased delivery efficiency and customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, blockchain technology ensures supply chain transparency and traceability while addressing food safety and quality-related issues. IoT devices enable the real-time tracking of food temperature and delivery status, enhancing online food deliveries' reliability. Integrating AI-based demand forecasting with IoT-driven inventory management and blockchain-based supply chain verification could generate an efficient online food delivery system and provide customers with more accurate delivery estimates, real-time order tracking, and food quality and safety assurances.

The social prevalence of online food deliveries has resulted in the transition from home-cooked meals to frequent consumption through digital platforms, the potential decline in cooking skills and food preparation knowledge among younger household members, and shifts in urban mobility patterns and community interactions. Traffic flow changes in the city due to the prevalence of delivery vehicles and cyclists could affect urban planning. The lack of face-to-face interactions in local restaurants might also change the social fabric of neighborhoods. Overall, these alterations raise key concerns about the long-term implications for community cohesion, local economies, and public health.

Industry practitioners must internalize the fundamentals of online food deliveries following its rapid industrial growth. This knowledge lays the groundwork for practitioners to better align their operations with market trends and customer expectations via effective strategies and innovations. Understanding the connotation of online food deliveries involves recognizing various service models. Third-party platforms offer a wider customer base (albeit with high commission fees), while direct-to-consumer models offer improved profit margins (albeit with robust internal logistics). This delineation is critical for application developers, restaurant managers, and marketers to optimize their business models<sup>26</sup> and make informed decisions that complement their operational capacities and financial goals.

Application developers and digital service providers who better understand multiple online food delivery touchpoints, from browsing menus to placing orders and tracking deliveries, can design user-friendly platforms tailored to meet restaurant and consumer expectations in terms of secure payment methods and real-time order tracking.<sup>27</sup> A clear definition assists these developers in incorporating key features (personalized recommendations and push notifications) that positively influence consumer behavior.

Software engineers working on food delivery apps must consider the integration of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, as these can significantly optimize operations. Real-time data from IoT-enabled devices improves delivery efficiency, food safety, and customer satisfaction by enabling temperature monitoring, route optimization, and inventory management. Practitioners should leverage IoT to enhance customer experience through personalized recommendations, predictive algorithms for demand, and transparent supply chains via blockchain technology. By implementing these advanced tools, engineers can build resilient, scalable platforms that

meet both operational demands and evolving user expectations. This synthesis highlights the importance of adopting IoT as a standard feature to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving market.

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