How Online Food Delivery Influences Human Behaviour? – A Phenomenological Account of Urban Consumers

Ibrahim Noorani
Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University
ibrahim.noorani@bbsul.edu.pk

Dr. Nazia Abdul Rehman
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Federal Urdu University Arts, Science & Technology Karachi
nazia.shakir@fuuast.edu.pk

Dr. Khurram Shakir
Assistant Professor, Benazir School of Business , Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University, Lyari Karachi
khurram.shakir@bbsul.edu.pk

Dr.Hassaan Ahmed
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Sciences, Salim Habib University
hassaan.ahmed@shu.edu.pk

Dr.Zubair Ahmed Shah
Assistant Professor, Salim Habib University Karachi, Pakistan.
zubair.shah@shu.edu.pk

Abstract

Food delivery services have become a growing system in Pakistan, enabling consumers to order food from their favorite restaurants and have it delivered directly to their doorstep. The present study, incorporating a phenomenological approach, aims to explore how food delivery services can impact human behavior of urban consumers in Pakistan. The study examines six key factors - behavioral intention, perceived ease of use, convenience motivation, loyalty, privacy & security and hedonic motivation - and how they influence human behavior when using food delivery services. Through snowball sampling, 12 respondents were interviewed to gain insight into their lived experiences related to food delivery services. Thematic analysis revealed that food delivery services have a significant impact on human behavior, particularly in terms of increasing mental attitudes and moral underpinnings. The findings attempted to provide a first-hand perspective towards understanding behaviour modification in relation to online food delivery, experiencing the changing way urbanized citizens in Pakistan think about and interact with food, and how they possess the potential to influence consumers' overall experience.

Keywords: *Online Food Delivery, Hedonism, Moral Psychology, Motivation.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of food distribution, either through delivery or self-pickup, is in contrast to preparing one's own meal. Though it may seem like a recent development, the concept of meal delivery systems can be traced back to the Dabbawallas of India in the 19th century (Chakraborty & Hargude, 2015), where they packed hot homemade lunches for busy workers transported via bicycles and trains, concocting a sustainable and eco-friendly delivery system. However, in recent times, food delivery has been facilitated through websites or mobile applications, which allows us to order almost anything and have it delivered to our homes in a timely manner. With the passage of time, many these services apart from delivering food, also are catering to various dietary requirements such as gluten-free, keto, paleo, and food allergies.

Pakistan, over a decade, has seen a rising trend in Online Food Delivery (OFD) service. Companies such as FoodPanda, Cheetay, Eat Mubarak, Super Meal, Foodfista, Hi Food, Byte, Uber Eats, Sasti Food Pakistan, Bykea, and Careem has all been involved with Online Food Delivery. Since most of the services operate in urban cities, the rising trend of online food delivery services can be attributed to the change in eating habits of urban consumers. The reliance on OFD is primarily for convenient and variety meals, especially during or after busy workdays. The diverse range of food choices available on OFD eliminates the need for customers to plan out their meal requirements, whether it be cooking at home, dining out at a restaurant, or purchasing takeaway food.

Ranked 13th amongst that countries that order most online foods, Pakistanis find online food delivery services (OFD) not only to be a convenient choice but is also crucial in transferring consumer trust in restaurants and homemade food providers (Raza, Asif & Akram 2023). Consumers, who are satisfied with ordering food online, generally report receiving fresh and healthy meals at their homes or workplaces, while relieving many from the hassle of preparing food. Moreover, city dwellers consider this as an advantage opting to relax at home instead of spending extra time going out to eat. Evidently, online food delivery services offer customers convenience and save them time, allowing them to purchase food without leaving the comfort of their homes or offices.

Although online food delivery services are becoming increasingly significant in Pakistan and consumer behavior is shifting accordingly, there is a lack of literature regarding the factors that

contribute to the use of such services among urbanites. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore behavioral modifications, as gained from the lived experiences of consumers who frequently order food online. create a comprehensive model that assesses the factors influencing the intention to use online food delivery services in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Southeast Asia has a massive OFD marketplace, and the delivery market is expected to grow significantly in the future. the food delivery industry is expected to achieve annual sales of USD 956 million by 2022, making it one of the most rapidly expanding sectors within the food market (Rachmad, & Budiyanto, 2022). Market research reports indicate that people who use Online Food Delivery platforms are typically working adults between the ages of 35 and 44, who have a high disposable income (Horta et al., 2021). Thus, it is imperative to investigate the impact such technology is likely to have on its users. Extant literature incorporated the following behavioral tendencies as resultant habituations of food ordering:

Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention refers to a person's willingness to engage in a particular behavior. Behavioral intention, in consumer behaviour refers to a type of buying intention, which considers anticipation of customers' purchasing patterns and their willingness to adopt Online Food Delivery (OFD) services in the future. It has a significant impact on a person's decision to use OFD services, as valuing service quality, food hygiene and reward perceptions are crucial in shaping consumers' attitudes towards (OFD) services. (Yeo et al. 2017; Ghosh 2020; Gupta & Duggal 2021; Koay et al. 2022).

However, studies have found that feelings of Feelings of insecurity and discomfort are significantly negatively correlated with the intention to utilize OFD ordering services. (Bates et al., 2020).

In the context of online grocery shopping, several scholars have identified There is a significant positive correlation between social norms and behavioral intention. This suggests that an individual's perception of what others in their social circle expect or recommend regarding the use of online grocery shopping can strongly influence their own intention to use such services (Hansen 2008; Piroth et al., 2020).

Researchers have discovered regarding the use of drone food delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, that a positive attitude has a significant impact on behavioral intention. This suggests that a person's opinion and general perception can influence their intention to engage with such services. (Rajesh, Rajeev & Rajendran 2022).

Similarly, in other studies, researchers have found that attitude and intention are closely linked when it comes to the use of technology. For example, a study on the use of robotic technology in restaurants found that consumers' positive attitudes towards robotics have a significant impact on their behavioral intentions, including the intention to use, word-of-mouth recommendations, and willingness to pay more. (Um, Kim & Chung 2020).

Perceived Ease of Use

The Perceptions of Ease of Use (PEOU) of an innovation measure how easy it is to use, understand, and teach technology (Rogers, 2010). Consult (2002) advocated that PEOU is a measure of respondents' willingness to try out new technology in an environment where they can easily assess its benefits. It has been recognized as a critical factor in changing consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions, as well as establishing consumers' acceptance of technology usage (Cho & Sagynov, 2015).

PEOU measures the simplicity of using, understanding, and teaching an innovation. It is a crucial component in altering consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions and establishing their acceptance of technology usage. Perceived Ease of Use ultimately affects consumers' behavioral intention, especially in virtual spaces, and has a significant positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Cho & Sagynov, 2015). Researchers have found that consumers' adaptation intentions towards a new technology is necessarily determined by their perceptions of how comfortably they can operate, and so the adoption of any online service depends on the adopter's potential ease of accessing technology, availability of information, ability to engage in live interactions, as well as freedom to provide feedback, which can be either positive or negative. (Ramayah & Ignatius, 2005; Chen & Barnes, 2007; Chiu & Wang, 2008; Jahangir & Begum, 2008; De Pelsmaeker et al., 2017; Wang and Somogy, 2018; Gupta et al., 2019; Piroth et al., 2020, Chen & Aklikokou 2020; Tsai et al., 2023). This perceived ease of use has attracted a large number of consumers to avail online food services, as this fulfills both their social and personal needs.

Convenience Motives

Convenience is a critical factor in predicting consumer attitudes towards and willingness to use online food delivery (OFD) services. Researchers have established a positive relationship between convenience and consumers' intention to use OFD services (Suhan, 2015; Ali et al., 2020; Saad 2021). Gani et al., (2020) found that consumers are more likely to use online food delivery services that are perceived as convenient and time-saving, while Kalimuthu & Sabari Ajay (2020) noted that urban residents turn to online food delivery services due to a lack of time to prepare meals. The fast-paced life of urban residents is making it increasingly difficult for them to find time to prepare meals, particularly during the workweek. As a result, many are turning to either online food or simply skipping meals altogether (Botchway et al, 2015).

Moreover, OFD platforms are cautious in timely delivery of food to customers at their preferred locations, while simultaneously allowing consumers to choose variety of menus from various local foodservice outlets, offering discounts, promotional vouchers, free delivery and healthy food options (as opposed to simply fast food), (Cho et al., 2019; Bates et al., 2020; Hwang & Kim 2021). This level of convenience systematically meets consumers' expectations, and strengthens buying intentions, as customers feel motivated to keep ordering food online more frequently.

Sense of Privacy, Security and Trust

Customers' willingness to purchase goods or services online is closely tied to their level of trust in the online platform or service provider. Privacy and security have always been the major concern for online consumers. Since most of the online food platforms provide data encryption, have secured payment systems implemented and assure data privacy, customers are likely to develop trust and encouragement in frequent higher value purchases (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2000; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Sultan & Uddin, 2011; Thamaraiselvan et al. 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2019).

Loyalty

The loyalty of customers can be influenced by the performance of the app, the quality of the food, and the quality of service. Since online food delivery platforms provide their customers with an opportunity to react upon the quality of food they get, while also sharing partial

responsibility by providing refunds and cashback vouchers if the food quality is in anyway compromised. This serves a kind of solace and is deemed as a significant reason to opt for ordering food online, greatly influencing customer loyalty (Ghosh, 2020).

Moreover, the features of mobile apps used for these services also have a crucial impact on both satisfaction and loyalty. Apps that provide adequate tracking ability, estimated arrival time, prompt addressal to complaints and maintenance of public health and hygiene protocols, help build an emotional connection with customers (Kumar & Shah 2021). Watson (2022) corroborated that food delivery services significantly impact customer satisfaction, as they are responsible for ensuring customers' safety pleasure and enjoyment.

Hedonistic Value

Consumers opt for online food delivery mainly on utilitarian grounds. Liu, Li, Edu, Jozsa, & Negricea, (2019), found that online ordering and mobile shopping can serve a powerful arousal cause, since they offer information (authentic descriptions & user feedback), provide entertainment (making shopping fun as to choose from a vast variety of food), and enhances personalization (catering to consumer preferences and customization) fueling customer with positive emotions, ultimately increasing the hedonic value of their ordering experience.

Thus, the above review of literature summarizes the motives for preferring online food delivery services for meeting their daily meal requirements. However, as research on this mode of food delivery remains unquenched, ongoing monitoring and evaluation is critical to the development of policy options for regulating the digital food environment while considering its impact on human behaviour.

Research Design & Phenomenological Analysis

Research Approach

Since the nature of this study is explorative, an interpretivist approach was incorporated, based on the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. This approach seeks to explore the subjective and experiential meanings that individuals attach to their lived experiences in the context of OFDs.

Population Sampling:

Creswell, & Báez (2020) stipulate that for a phenomenological inquiry subjects need to be persons who have considerably experienced the phenomenon in question and are able to articulate their lived experiences. Earlier research recommended a sample size of minimum 12 respondents to be adequate for data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014), and so, the present study utilized a 12-respondent sample for qualitative analysis.

Purposive Sampling was carried out to select participants which are frequent users of online food delivery services, from urban areas in Karachi, Pakistan. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, primed with open-ended questioning, were conducted to gather participants' experiences after obtaining informed consent from them. Purposive sampling helped with identifying the appropriate targets who can articulate detailed information about the phenomenon under study. Despite its obvious drawbacks, purposive sampling, at this initial inquiry into this phenomenon deemed most appropriate, as it allowed the research being a worthwhile topic of examination, suggesting that the phenomenon is worth investigating further (Bakkalbasioglu, 2020).

Data Collection

The study undertook two rounds of data collection and cover approximately 40 hours of audio recordings and copious notes. Urdu was the official language of communication, and the accounts have been translated into English for broader understanding. Field notes during observations were also considered to gain better insight into the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were first transcribed and then a thematic analysis was applied on the gathered information. Themes were coded and labelled along the lines of the abovementioned themes gather from extant literature. Interviews were then thoroughly studied and answers to the questions were organized, arranged and interpreted in a structured manner, such as narrations, descriptions, definitions, classifications, comparisons, analogies and cause & effect dimensions.

Special care was assured towards maintaining the dignity, integrity and confidentiality of the respondents, and thus the respondents were respectfully appreciated for their valuable discussions.

Table 1

Demography

Respondent	Gender	Age Group	Designation	Qualification	Experience
R1	Male	30 to 40	Hotel Manager	Post-Graduate	5 years
R2	Male	30 to 40	Banker	Post-Graduate	3 years
R3	Female	20 to 30	Student	Post-Graduate	3 years
R4	Female	20 to 30	Online Banking	Undergraduate	1 year
R5	Female	30 to 40	Entrepreneur	Post-Graduate	8 years
R6	Male	20 to 30	Supervisor	Post-Graduate	6 years
R7	Female	20 to 30	Housewife	Graduate	3 years
R8	Female	20 to 30	HR officer	Post-Graduate	2 years
R9	Female	20 to 30	Part Time Teacher	Undergraduate	4 years
R10	Male	20 to 30	Cashier	Graduate	2 years
R11	Male	20 to 30	Salesman	Post-Graduate	1 year
R12	Male	20 to 30	Private Business	Post-Graduate	1 year

Table 2
Themes

Themes	Sub - Categories	Category Description	Examples
Perceived ease of use	Learnability; Ease of Payment; Best-seller options	The degree to which a product or system is easy to understand and use.	R4' I have grown quite accustomed to the features; they are easy to use as I am not one for the complicated stuff … gaining access to food has never been so easy'.
Convenience Motivation	Saves time & energy; Variety of Choices; Order Tracking	The degree to which a product or service makes it easy for the user to accomplish their task or goals	R9: 'OFD … why not? It saves time, is less hassle and food is just a click away … and the best part is you know exactly when its going to arrive'
Loyalty	Continuous; Repetition; emotional relationship	The consistency of that loyalty over time. resulting in repeat purchases	R1: It has become quite a regular thing for me … you eat what you like, and if you don't like what you get you can always leave a complaint, knowing that it will be addressed'.

Privacy and security	Data protection; Cyber security	Measures taken to protect personal information, while safeguarding against unauthorized access or data breaches	R5: 'Security has never been issue with me … we all have a unique username and password, and even when the transaction is made, I have to first approve via my phone, so no threats of being misused'
Behavioral Intention	Subjective norm	the behaviour and the perceived social pressure to engage in or avoid the behaviour	R7' Nowadays, culture has changed Unfortunately, it seems like families aren't really eating together as much anymore".
Hedonic motivation	Pleasure-seeking	The drive to seek out and engage in activities that bring pleasure or enjoyment.	R6'We love it when what we have ordered arrives in time and is fresh and hot".

Discussion

Perceived Ease of Use

All our participants conveyed that the integration of technology has facilitated the seamless utilization of food delivery services. Key aspects highlighted by respondents encompassed the streamlined processes of ordering and payment, the ability to track deliveries, and the option to provide ratings and reviews. Furthermore, numerous individuals expressed a preference for mobile applications as their preferred means of engaging with such services.

> *"Technology has made life easy … you can enjoy all the benefits simply from the comfort of your couch."* (R10)

> *"These apps are so user friendly that my 7-year-old knows how to order"* (R1)

> "*What's great is how much time you save by having fresh food delivered at your doorstep! Plus, it's so convenient to have everything you need right at your fingertips"* (R6)

Even though OFD services make it easy to get food quickly and conveniently, it significantly affects our attitudes towards food. Food becomes a mere enjoyable commodity rather than

something cherished as a success, as it used to be when acquiring food was concomitant with struggle. Moreover, the user-friendly design poses no challenge to our cognitive abilities equating children and adults alike.

> *"It saves the hassle of bargaining and useless arguing; it's become so effortless! With just one touch, the item reaches my doorstep. It's amazing!"* (R7)

OFD usage has the potential to confine individuals within their premises, thereby limiting opportunities for external engagement and interpersonal interactions. Consequently, this trend may engender a decline in social interactions, deteriorating human ability to negotiate and weaken the fabric of communal bonds.

Convenience Motivation

The notion of convenience, as acknowledged by 11 out of 12 respondents, serves as the impetus to opt for OFDs. Respondents reported the principal advantage conferred by such services pertains to the time saved by not having to cook at home or physically visiting a restaurant. Participants appreciated the convenience of ordering food from their homes or workplaces and having it delivered directly to them. For examples:

> *"It's practical don't you think … I mean ordering food online is easy and efficient and saves time too … I mostly do OFD if there is no one at home"* (R2)

> *"Its been a long time since I had to plan for meals or shop for groceries … you get everything just at a click of button".* (R8).

While comfort is desirable, being too comfortable can exert negative influences on human behaviour. Convenience is likely to develop a sense of monotony, which may be conducive towards belittling the value of a meal. In past-times, food preparation held in high esteem the effort and hard work involved in obtaining sustenance, however the current ease provided by online food delivery may lead to a decrease in the respect given to the inherent worth of food.

Overall, it appears that the convenience of online food delivery has the potential to both benefit and harm human behaviour. Where, on the one hand, it increases efficiency and reduces stress associated with meal preparation, conversely, it harbors the potential to complacency, diminished sense of achievement and devaluation of food, which can impact psychological well-being.

Loyalty

Food service providers are continuously striving towards prioritizing accuracy and to minimize errors to maintain consumer loyalty. Since consumers have the options alternate between apps, competition drives OFDs to keep their customers satisfied.

> "*Last time, for a friend's birthday, we ordered a cake but unfortunately, it arrived in bad condition. However, we did not have to worry much as we complained about it and the service provider was kind enough to make a refund for us. It was such a relief!*" (R2)

Even though Loyalty towards the service provider is positively attributed, however, the consumer may fall into blind allegiance, due to which the service provider gains control over consumers' intrinsic motivations. Too much reliance on food being delivered from outside shifts our trust from our own ability to provide on to money, which ultimately becomes the trustworthy means of sustenance for a happier life.

Privacy & Security

Most OFDs take great caution in protecting sensitive customer information, maintaining encrypted payment systems, and safeguarding their websites or apps with impenetrable firewalls securing customers from potential identity theft or financial fraud. Customers when feel secure and safe while using OFD apps or services, they are more likely to continue using them.

> "*My preferred service has never made me feel insecure … I am satisfied with the privacy regulations*" (R3)

However, it is worth noting that online food delivery apps may share customer data with restaurants or other third-party service providers for specific purposes related to the delivery service. This sharing of data is typically done to facilitate the order fulfillment process, ensure accurate delivery, or provide personalized services to customers (Aulia et al., 2017).

For example, customer information such as name, address, and contact details may be shared with restaurants to process orders and deliver the food to the correct location. Additionally, aggregated and anonymized data may be used for analytics and market research purposes. This results in a mutually advantageous exploitation, where one party in an interaction does not experience a worsened condition while the benefits derived from the interaction are

disproportionately allocated to the exploiting party, segueing into an inherent deception for the user.

Behavioral Intention

9 out of 12 participants mentioned that the growing use of food delivery services was impacting traditional food culture in Pakistan. Participants noted that the convenience of ordering food online has led to a decline in home-cooking, while a heightened reliance on food delivery services. Some also mentioned that traditional food culture was losing its importance as people were increasingly opting for fast food and restaurant meals.

> *"I find cooking at home to be overwhelming sometimes ... I mean why not treat yourself and order something delicious from outside? You deserve it right*!" (R9)

> *"We order food online very often since my husband is a real foodie ... that's why what we work so hard for – that's what he says with a smile"* (R8)

Mental attitudes, social perceptions, past experiences, and moral beliefs are various factors that exert influence upon the subjective probability of a person to engage in a particular behaviour. The ever-increasing reliance on OFDs, particularly on part of those with busy schedules, has sparked a radical behavioral transformation towards convenience orientation, crowding-out the value of food. It's only natural to place a higher value on things which are acquired through hard work and dedicated efforts, however, none of that matters when the hard work is committed towards earning money while growing and preparing food becomes acquiescent to it.

> "*Earlier I didn't have much experience with OFDs, I had heard that the food quality is compromised upon delivery. But guess what? When I got what I ordered from them, I was absolutely thrilled! I mean, seriously, it was a great experience ... Now we do it often*" (R6)

Respondents acknowledged "time-saving" to be a significant advantage for opting OFDs. However, when asked about the things they do to utilize their time otherwise, almost all of them suggested activities which were all market driven.

> "*My order history is saved in the app so reordering saves a lot of time ... time that I can allocate towards productive activities.*" (R12).

"*I admit that social media scrolling, viewing posts, checking updates, and engaging with online content takes up a lot of my time.*" (R7).

Thus, OFDs possess the potential to change users' behavioral intentions, allowing for the possibility of transitioning into a market society where even the most where social norms and values are encroached upon by market forces.

Hedonistic motivation

Food was traditionally served as a means to satiate our hunger, providing us with nutrients needed for bodily nourishment, for which respect, value and gratitude necessarily followed. However, the advent of mass-production has turned food from something which was a means into an end-for-itself. In urban societies, we no longer consume food for just bodily nourishment but rather for enjoyment and pleasure. All our respondents unanimously acknowledged this fact that the primary reason they opted ordering food online was motivated by pleasure. Not only did they enjoy the convenience of ordering food online and the anticipation of the arrival of their food as per desire, but the promotional offers and discounts provided by food delivery services also added to their pleasure.

"*The app through which I order food always has amazing discounts available, so why not take advantage of them*" (R10)

"*Food promotions on the app from various restaurants are usually so enticing that my heart is absolutely drawn to order food from them online.*" (R11)

7 participants reported a therapeutic purpose that ordering food served for them. They reported that having the right kind of food readily available to them acted as a coping strategy to deal with boredom or sadness. Apart from being taste bud stimulants, food evoked positive emotions and feelings of comfort in our respondents.

"*It's a fantastic feeling when I can order dishes which has happy memories for me ... it's sort of an emotional contentment*". (R12)

"*This has become my go-to remedy! Whenever I am feeling low, all I got to do is order some delicious food to lift my spirits*" (R5)

9 out of 12 participants expressed concerns over the proclivity of overeating or binging despite having a full stomach, causing individuals to lose track of how much they've consumed. They also acknowledged the strain this habit had started to have upon their finances, as they are spending a substantial portion of their earnings on ordering food solely for hedonistic purposes.

> "*Ordering food is definitely way pricier than cooking at home, it sure has increased our monthly expenditure.*" (R6)

> "S*ometimes it can be tough to resist the urge to indulge in some extra snacks*" (R4)

Thus, OFDs have the potential to alter human relationship with food, as it can harm our treatment of food in terms of the way it used to be respected or valued.

Conclusion

The present phenomenological analysis provides valuable insights into the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers related to various OFD services operating in Pakistan. Micrological analysis into this social phenomenon highlights how OFDs can exert a significant influence on people's food relationships, leading to changes in behaviour and thinking. When families grew, prepared, or cooked their own food, the primary motivation behind it was nourishment and love. However, ever since individuals started relying on service providers to cater to their hunger needs, it is imperative to take into account the motivation with which meals are prepared. This motivation is purely materialistic and profit oriented. Such promotional activities are impacting people's attitudes towards food, altering their priorities, cultural traditions and expressions of individual freedom.

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