

Issues and Constraints Encountered by Customers in Online Food Delivery Services in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of online food delivery (OFD) platforms has significantly transformed consumer dining behaviour by offering enhanced convenience, accessibility, and variety. Despite these advantages, the sector continues to face several operational and service-related challenges that adversely affect customer satisfaction. This study examines the key difficulties encountered by customers during the online food ordering process, with particular emphasis on delivery delays, non-transparent or excessive delivery charges, and errors in order fulfilment. Furthermore, the research investigates technological issues such as unresponsive application interfaces and inadequate real-time order tracking, as well as service-related shortcomings including inefficient grievance redressal mechanisms and inconsistent food quality upon delivery. The analysis reveals a notable gap between customers' digital service expectations and the operational realities of last-mile delivery. The findings indicate that although convenience is a major factor driving the adoption of OFD platforms, sustained customer loyalty is largely influenced by service reliability, pricing transparency, and effective communication. The study offers valuable insights for platform operators and service providers to improve customer experience and strengthen long-term engagement.

Keywords: Online Food Ordering, Customer Experience, Late Delivery, Incorrect Orders, App Usability, Service Quality, Transparent Pricing.

1. Introduction

Customers can now order meals with just a few taps on their smartphones thanks to the rapid progress of digital technology, which has completely changed the food delivery industry. The simplicity of use, variety, and speed of online meal delivery services have made them extremely popular. However, despite their widespread usage, clients often run across a number of issues when placing orders. With an emphasis on factors including usability, delivery efficiency, pricing, customer service, and overall happiness, this study aims to explore the challenges that customers have when using online meal delivery services. By

looking at client experiences, this study seeks to identify the primary issues influencing consumer preferences and loyalty to meal delivery services. The study will also examine other platforms to highlight their benefits and drawbacks from the perspective of the customer. Understanding these challenges will help businesses improve user experience, improve offerings, and develop long-term client connections. Ultimately, this study will offer significant insights into the evolving dynamics of the online meal delivery sector and its impact on customer behaviour.

Customer behaviour refers to how people make decisions and what they do when they purchase and use goods or services. It encompasses the various economic, social, and psychological factors that affect consumer choices. Understanding consumer behaviour is essential for businesses because it allows them to tailor their marketing strategies, improve customer satisfaction, and increase sales. In addition to external influences like social trends, advertising tactics, and peer recommendations, internal factors like individual preferences and attitudes also have an impact on consumer behaviour. Customer satisfaction and experiences on online meal delivery platforms are heavily influenced by consumer perception. Customers evaluate these services based on factors such as meal quality, cost, brand recognition, delivery time, and customer service. Easy ordering, timely delivery, and well-packaged meals improve a positive perception and foster brand loyalty. However, negative experiences—such as incorrect orders, late deliveries, hidden costs, or poor customer support—can significantly affect how customers perceive the platform, leading to dissatisfaction and a decline in trust. To maintain a strong and favourable brand reputation, businesses operating in this industry should place a high priority on enhancing service reliability, price clarity, and effective communication.

Online Food Delivery Platforms

Online food delivery platforms are digital services that allow clients to order and receive food from restaurants via mobile applications or websites. People can easily and effectively enjoy their favourite dishes without ever leaving their houses thanks to these platforms. Online meal delivery services have become an essential component of contemporary lives by providing features like menu browsing, price comparisons, safe payment methods, and real-time tracking. Well-known services like Zomato, Swiggy, Uber Eats, and DoorDash serve a broad clientele, guaranteeing access to a variety of foods and eating styles while improving consumer convenience.

Convenience, quickness, and accessibility are key components of the online meal delivery concept. These platforms use cutting-edge technology like machine learning, data analytics, and artificial intelligence to optimize delivery times and customize recommendations. They also use discounts, subscription models, and loyalty programs to keep clients and promote repeat business. Food delivery platforms now offer quick deliveries, often within 10 to 30 minutes, thanks to the growth of digital payments and better transportation networks. This has completely changed the eating experience and redefined the food service sector. Online food delivery services have grown significantly in recent years as a result of shifting consumer tastes and technical developments. As consumers looked for secure, contactless dining options, the COVID-19 pandemic further boosted their uptake. These platforms are still developing today, emphasizing quicker deliveries, more restaurant partnerships, and better customer service. In order to stay competitive, businesses are making significant investments in supply chain effectiveness and innovation.

Online food delivery services are anticipated to be vital to the food industry's future as customer demand for convenience keeps growing.

Scope of the Study

The study examines the several difficulties consumers have while placing online food orders, such as delivery delays, wrong orders, and problems with food quality that affect overall satisfaction. It looks at how platform policies impact user trust and retention and how customer service responsiveness plays a part in resolving complaints. The study examines technical problems that impede a seamless ordering experience, such as app crashes, payment errors, and navigational challenges. It looks into pricing issues that affect consumers' decisions to buy, such as surge pricing, delivery fees, and hidden costs. The study assesses the effects of outside variables on prompt delivery and customer satisfaction, such as traffic, weather, and restaurant preparation time. It offers recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and dependability of online meal delivery services as well as insights into consumer expectations.

Review of literature

Rathore &Chaudhary, (2018) found that time was the most important factor. Early delivery is important to consumers because it saves them time, and in today's dynamic world, nobody wants to waste time on non-productive things. The 24/7 services offered by online food delivery platforms have a major impact, as consumers are not restricted to specific time limits. Convenience is the biggest factor driving online food ordering, as it allows consumers to order food from the comfort of their homes without having to travel. This convenience provides a sense of control and authority over what to buy, and also enables consumers to select from a wide variety of products on the internet. Other important factors include ease of accessibility, multiple payment options, and flexibility provided by online food delivery apps.

According to **Ramakanta Prusty and Bhavik Shah (2019)**, working women do not have enough time to prepare meals. Online meal delivery services help these women overcome this issue and make their homes and offices more comfortable. It also aids in getting rid of the lengthy queue outside the eatery. It also demonstrates how quick delivery services are made possible by food delivery apps, which are simple to use and convenient. The most popular online meal delivery services among consumers are Swiggy, Zomato, and Uber Eats. When it comes to online meal delivery apps, the majority of young people are drawn to savings.

Based on real-time delivery, online meal delivery is regarded as a very effective service. Restaurants can use current employees for self-delivery, such as waitresses in certain small restaurants, or, like several well-known restaurant chains, they can hire and train specialised delivery personnel. Alternatively, restaurants can employ a network of independent contractor delivery workers, crowdsourced logistics, and a method that provides an economical, effective food delivery. In the meantime, online delivery platforms are in charge of recruiting staff members and delivering their training. Additionally, skilled or personal riders are frequently trained, and at least a portion of their earnings is guaranteed; the remaining amount is dependent on commission.

(Miroso, Bremer, and Li 2020). Food delivery drivers showed a positive correlation between time restrictions and erratic driving, according to group differences. For regular e-bike riders, personal standards serve as a more effective deterrent than the idea of traffic enforcement, even while traffic enforcement greatly reduces the aggressive driving behaviour displayed by food delivery drivers (Dong et al., 2021). The market for food delivery has clearly grown during the last five years. Due to platform-to-consumer companies like DoorDash and Uber Eats, food delivery has expanded to include everything, potentially generating billions of dollars in revenue. During the COVID-19 shutdown, millions of individuals placed their first online food orders, propelling the industry forward (Curry, 2023).

Abbas et al (2023) found that a wider range of demand groups would make it more challenging to deliver goods on schedule and in the right condition (particularly at the required temperature). For example, a meal delivery driver must ensure timely delivery if a diabetic customer orders anything online out of desperation; otherwise, the customer faces significant health risks. Customers' satisfaction and loyalty to online food delivery services are significantly impacted by prompt delivery.

Statement of the Problem

People's access to food services has changed as a result of the growth of online food delivery businesses like Swiggy, Zomato, Eat Sure, Eat Club, and others. These platforms have gained popularity among urban customers due to their promise of speed, convenience, and variety. Nevertheless, despite their increasing appeal, clients frequently run against a number of obstacles that impede their entire experience. These include delivery partner behaviour, incorrect orders, bad packaging, late deliveries, and inconsistent pricing policies, all of which have an impact on consumer happiness and confidence. Additionally, users become frustrated by technological problems including app breakdowns, payment failures, and improper order tracking. Refund delays, cancellation policies, and customer service response are other issues that customers deal with. Despite these platforms' significant investments in technology and logistics, there are still gaps in the regularity and quality of their services. These issues affect how dependable and efficient online meal delivery services are thought to be, particularly at busy times or in isolated areas. In order to enhance platform efficiency and guarantee enduring client loyalty, it is essential to comprehend the difficulties that customers encounter. The purpose of this study is to pinpoint and examine the particular challenges that consumers face when placing online food orders. The study will offer insights that can assist platforms improve their services, optimize operations, and promote a more dependable and user-friendly food delivery experience by analyzing customer feedback and behaviours patterns.

Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate how these challenges affect user experience overall, customer happiness, and trust.
- To investigate external factors that impact delivery inefficiencies, such as traffic, weather, and restaurant operations.
- To evaluate how well customer service handles complaints and questions about refunds or compensation.
- To assess the security and payment problems that consumers face, including unsuccessful online transactions, hidden costs, and worries about data privacy.

Hypothesis of the Study

- ❖ H₀: There is no association between income level of the respondents and Average amount spending per order.
- ❖ H₀: There is no association between occupational status of the respondents and most use of food delivery platform.

Research Methodology

In order to investigate consumer experiences, typical problems, and satisfaction levels when utilizing several meal delivery apps including Swiggy, Zomato, EatSure, EatClub, and Uber Eats, the study used a descriptive research approach. The goal is to comprehend the kinds of problems that consumers encounter when placing orders, receiving deliveries, using apps, and interacting with customer support. A standardized Google Forms questionnaire aimed at consumers of online meal delivery services is used to collect primary data. Delivery delays, software bugs, payment difficulties, poor customer support, and packaging problems are among the topics covered in this questionnaire. Convenience sampling will be used to select a sample size of 146 respondents from a range of demographic groups, such as age, gender, and occupation in Tamil Nadu, in order to collect a variety of user experiences and viewpoints. secondary data is gathered from periodicals, industry reports, official websites, consumer reviews, and research articles. Descriptive statistics (such as averages and percentages) and comparative analysis will be used to assess the gathered data in order to show how frequently and what kinds of difficulties users encounter across various platforms

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Frequency of Use of Most Frequent Delivery Platforms

Primary App Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Swiggy	57	39.0
Zomato	63	43.2
EatSure	14	9.6
Others	12	8.2
Total	146	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 1 reveals that Zomato is the most frequently used food delivery platform among respondents, with 43.2% preferring it. Swiggy follows closely at 39.0%, indicating strong competition between the two leading platforms. Eat Sure is used by 9.6% of respondents, while 8.2% rely on other platforms. This suggests that while Zomato holds a slight edge in popularity, both Zomato and Swiggy dominate the market, collectively accounting for over 80% of user preference.

Table 2 Average Amount Spending per Order

Average Amount Spend per Order	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₹200	16	11.0
₹200-₹500	50	34.2
₹500-₹800	22	15.1
₹800-₹1000	22	15.1
Above ₹1000	36	24.7
Total	146	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 shows that the most common spending range per order is ₹200–₹500, chosen by 34.2% of respondents, indicating a moderate spending habit. Interestingly, a significant portion (24.7%) spends above ₹1000, suggesting a group of high-value users. The ₹500–₹800 and ₹800–₹1000 ranges each account for 15.1%, showing a fairly even distribution among mid-to-high spenders. Only 11.0% spend below ₹200, highlighting that most users are willing to spend a considerable amount per food delivery order.

Table 3 Frequency of Common Issue facing while placing the Order

Common Order Problem	Frequency	Percentage
App Crash or Errors	17	11.6
Incorrect Order	21	14.4
Delivery Today	23	15.8
Poor Customer Support	10	6.8
High Delivery Charges	75	51.4
Total	146	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table 3 reveals that the most common issue faced while placing online orders is high delivery charges, reported by 51.4% of respondents, highlighting a major concern among users. Delivery delays follow at 15.8%, and incorrect orders at 14.4%, indicating service reliability issues. Approaches or errors were experienced by 11.6%, while only 6.8% cited poor customer support. Overall, cost-related concerns appear to outweigh technical or service-related problems, suggesting a need for platforms to reassess their pricing strategies.

H₀: There is no association between income level of the respondents and Average amount spending per order

Table4 association between income level of the respondents and Average amount spending per order – Chi Square Test

Income Level	Amount Spending Per Order				Total	Chi-square value	P value
	Below ₹200	₹200-₹500	₹500-₹800	Above ₹1,000			
Up to ₹15,000	8	15	8	7	38	38.040 ^a	0.001
	(20.0%)	(37.5%)	(20.0%)	(50.0%)			
	[50.0%]	[30.0%]	[36.4%]	[31.8%]			
₹15,001-₹25,000	2	12	3	6	23		
	(8.7%)	(52.2%)	(13.1%)	(26.1%)			
	[12.5%]	[24.0%]	[13.6%]	[27.3%]			
₹25,001-₹35,000	2	9	3	2	16		
	(8.7%)	(39.1%)	(13.0%)	(8.7%)			
	[12.5%]	[18.0%]	[13.6%]	[9.1%]			
₹35,001-₹50,000	2	4	2	1	9		
	(15.4%)	(30.8%)	(15.4%)	(7.7%)			
	[12.5%]	[8.0%]	[9.1%]	[4.5%]			
Above ₹50,000	2	10	6	6	24		
	(4.3%)	(21.3%)	(12.8%)	(12.8%)			
	[12.5%]	[20.0%]	[27.3%]	[27.3%]			
TOTAL	16	50	22	22	110		

The value within () refers to Row Percentage.

The value within [] refers to Column Percentage.

The Chi-square test for the relationship between income level and spending per order yields a value of 38.040 with a p-value of 0.001, indicating a statistically significant association between these two variables. This low p-value (less than 0.05) suggests that the differences in spending behavior across different income groups are not due to random chance. Therefore, income level appears to have a significant impact on how much customers spend per order. Analysing the data more closely, we can see distinct spending patterns by income group. Individuals earning up to ₹15,000 are more likely to spend less than ₹1,000 per order, particularly favouring the ₹200–₹500 range (37.5%). In contrast, those earning above ₹50,000 have a more balanced distribution across the spending categories, with a noticeable portion (27.3%) spending between ₹500–₹800 and another 27.3% spending less than ₹1,000. Interestingly, higher income groups (especially above ₹50,000) are underrepresented in the lowest spending bracket (Above ₹200), suggesting a trend toward increased spending with higher income. This supports the idea that as income increases, consumers tend to make larger purchases per order.

H₀: There is no association between occupational status of the respondents and most use of food delivery platform.

Table 5 Association between occupational status of the respondents and Most use of food delivery platform – Chi Square Test

Occupational Status	Most use of food delivery platforms				Total	Chi-square value	P value
	Swiggy	Zomato	Uber Eats	Eat Sure			
Student	24	10	0	6	40	51.826 ^a	<0.001
	(60.0%)	(25.0%)	(0.0%)	(15.0%)			
	[42.1%]	[15.9%]	[0.0%]	[50.0%]			
Govt. Employee	6	5	0	0	11	51.826 ^a	<0.001
	(54.5%)	(45.5%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)			
	[10.5%]	[7.9%]	[0.0%]	[0.0%]			
Private Employee	13	35	14	0	62	51.826 ^a	<0.001
	(21.0%)	(56.5%)	(22.6%)	(0.0%)			
	[22.8%]	[55.6%]	[100.0%]	[0.0%]			
Professional	10	7	0	2	19	51.826 ^a	<0.001
	(52.6%)	(36.8%)	(0.0%)	(10.5%)			
	[17.5%]	[11.1%]	[0.0%]	[16.7%]			
Homemaker	4	6	0	4	14	51.826 ^a	<0.001
	(28.6%)	(42.9%)	(0.0%)	(28.6%)			
	[7.0%]	[9.5%]	[0.0%]	[33.3%]			
TOTAL	57	63	14	12	146		

The value within () refers to Row Percentage.

The value within [] refers to Column Percentage.

The Chi-square value of 51.826 with p-value of less than 0.001 reveals a statistically significant association between occupation and the preferred food delivery platform. This indicates that the choice of delivery app—Swiggy, Zomato, Uber Eats, or Eat Sure—is not evenly distributed across different occupational groups, but rather influenced by one's professional background. From the data, distinct preferences emerge. Students show a strong preference for Swiggy (60%) and Eat Sure (15%), suggesting they might value affordability, offers, or app usability. Private employees, who make up the largest user base overall (62 out of 146), favor Zomato significantly (56.5%), with a fair share using Uber Eats (22.6%). Notably, Uber Eats is only used by private employees, making up 100% of its users in the dataset. Homemakers also show a unique pattern, with usage spread between Swiggy, Zomato, and Eat Sure, but with no Uber Eats usage. Government employees and professionals lean more towards Swiggy and Zomato, but the lack of Uber Eats usage across all groups except private employees suggests either limited availability or less appeal among other occupational segments. In summary, platform preference is strongly shaped by occupation,

potentially due to differences in income, daily routine, value perception, or app familiarity. These insights could guide marketing strategies or service tailoring for food delivery companies looking to appeal to specific user segments.

Major findings

- Majority 58.2% of the respondents are male. This suggests a noticeable imbalance, with males comprising a larger portion of the group.
- Maximum 32% of the respondents fall under the age group of 21-30 years. This indicates that while younger individuals dominate the sample, there is still a fair representation across all age ranges.
- Majority 55.5% are married. This indicates a relatively balanced distribution between married and unmarried participants, with a small leaning towards those who are married.
- Majority 61% of the respondents hold an UG degree. This indicates that most participants have pursued formal higher education, which could influence their knowledge, skills, and decision-making in the context of the study.
- Maximum 42.5% of the respondents are private employees. This indicates a workforce largely engaged in the private sector, with a notable presence of students, indicating a mix of working professionals and individuals still in education.
- Maximum 32.2% of the respondents earn above ₹50,000. This indicates a diverse economic background among respondents, with both lower and higher income groups well represented.
- Maximum 34.2% of the respondents prefer ordering food through online food platform once a week. This indicates that moderate usage, with most people using food delivery services on a weekly or occasional basis.
- Maximum 43.2% of the respondents prefer Zomato and 39% of the respondents prefer Swiggy. This indicates that while Zomato holds a slight edge in popularity, both Zomato and Swiggy dominate the market, collectively accounting for over 80% of user preference.
- Majority 69.9% of the respondents prefer using mobile apps to place food orders. This indicates that a strong shift toward digital and app-based ordering, reflecting changing consumer behavior driven by ease of use and technological accessibility.
- Majority 67.3% of the respondents prefer UPI mode of payment. This indicates that while digital payments dominate, there is still a notable reliance on cash, possibly due to convenience or trust factors.
- Maximum 32.4% of the respondents spending range per order is ₹200-₹500. This suggests that most users are willing to spend a considerable amount per food delivery order.
- Maximum 41.8% of the respondents experience delayed food delivery sometimes. This suggests that occasional delays are common, frequent issues are relatively low, pointing to generally satisfactory delivery performance with room for improvement.

- Maximum 40.4% of the respondents have received the wrong item once or twice. This suggests that the majority have either never or only occasionally encountered wrong item issues, suggesting generally accurate service with occasional lapses.
- Majority 51.4% of the respondents faced issue of high delivery charges. This suggests that cost-related concerns appear to outweigh technical or service-related problems, suggesting a need for platforms to reassess their pricing strategies.
- Maximum 42.5% of the respondents face difficulties in getting a refund or compensation. This indicates that not everyone has encountered refund-related problems, a significant portion of users have faced at least occasional difficulties, pointing to an area where service improvement is needed.
- Maximum 50% of the respondents strongly agree the food prices are higher on food delivery platforms compared to restaurants. This indicates that the majority view suggests dissatisfaction with pricing on delivery apps, which could impact long-term user loyalty and ordering frequency.
- Majority 65.1% of the respondents have rarely received poor quality or stale food. This indicates that the findings suggest a high level of satisfaction with food quality among users, with very few encountering consistent problems.
- Majority 64.4% of the respondents are satisfied with the hygiene and packing of food deliveries. This indicates that most users perceive the hygiene and packaging standards of food delivery platforms as acceptable or better.
- Maximum 48.6% of the respondents rarely find delivery charges reasonable. This indicates that a majority of users perceive delivery charges as excessive or unjustified, which could affect their usage frequency and overall satisfaction with food delivery platforms.
- Maximum 48.6% of the respondents often face issues while applying coupons or offers, indicating a common frustration among users. This indicates that the majority encounter difficulties at least occasionally, suggesting that food delivery platforms need to improve the reliability and user-friendliness of their discount systems.
- Maximum 45.9% of the respondents are satisfied with real time order tracking. This indicates that real-time tracking is a well-received and reliable aspect of food delivery platforms, contributing positively to the overall user experience.
- Majority 64.4% of the respondents rated the behaviour of delivery personnel as good. This indicates a generally positive perception of delivery personnel, suggesting they are professional and courteous in most interactions.
- Maximum 46.6% of respondents always trust the ratings and reviews of restaurant on the platform. This indicates that the majority rely on ratings and reviews when choosing restaurants, suggesting that maintaining authentic and transparent feedback systems is crucial for platforms to retain user trust.

- Majority 60.3% of respondents preferring to order during dinner period. This indicates that food delivery platforms are most utilized in the evening, likely due to convenience after a long day.
- Maximum 34.2% of the respondents feel convenience is the top motivator for ordering food online. This indicates the ease of access and cost-saving benefits are the primary drivers behind online food ordering behaviour.

Suggestions

Several strategic interventions are suggested in order to enhance the general consumer experience with food delivery platforms in Tamil Nadu. To reduce delays, businesses should first improve their delivery and logistical systems. This can involve more delivery partners during peak hours, improved route optimization utilizing real-time traffic data, and improved coordination between delivery staff and restaurants to shorten order processing times. Second, for stability and usability, apps' digital interfaces need to be simplified. Slow loading times, frequent app crashes, or unsuccessful payments irritate users and may discourage them from using the service again. App performance and dependability can be greatly increased by frequent updates, user testing, and investments in scalable infrastructure. Customer expectations can also be managed by offering tools like order monitoring with real-time updates, projected delivery timings, and status alerts. Customer service is another important area that needs to be improved. To resolve problems fast and efficiently, a responsive, knowledgeable support staff should be accessible via chat, phone, and email. Efficiency and personalisation can be balanced by using AI chatbots for simple questions and live agents for more complicated issues. Finally, platforms ought to prioritise quality control and transparency. Trust can be raised by making sure restaurants follow hygienic guidelines, confirming the quality of the food, and appropriately showing restaurant ratings and reviews. Mechanisms for customer feedback should be prioritized, and in order to foster long-term loyalty and satisfaction, platforms must implement corrective measures in response to persistent concerns.

Conclusion

Digital food delivery platforms have revolutionized convenience and access to a range of cuisines, they are not without substantial pain points, according to a study on the difficulties people encounter when ordering food online in Tamil Nadu. Consumers regularly have problems with wrong orders, delayed deliveries, broken apps, and poor customer support. Even when the primary service food delivery is provided, these difficulties erode consumer confidence and may result in discontent. Online meal delivery is becoming more and more popular despite these problems, particularly in a fast-paced city like Tamil Nadu. Platforms now have a great chance to proactively solve these issues. Platforms can turn obstacles into competitive advantages by concentrating on increasing operational efficiency, bolstering app performance, improving customer service response, and guaranteeing constant food quality. The capacity of food delivery services in Tamil Nadu to offer not only food but also a dependable, open, and customer-focused experience will be crucial to their success. Businesses that pay attention to consumer input and make necessary adjustments will be better positioned to dominate the market and foster enduring brand loyalty.

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