

Customer's approach towards online food delivery system with reference to the COVID-19 lockdown scenario

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1 Introduction

The country faced lockdown and other imposed restrictions due to COVID-19. People have been undergoing a lot of changes with regard to work, lifestyle, buying preferences and other habits as well. When it came to buying various things on a regular basis during lockdown times, the customers have started giving preference to needs over wants. Food, for an instance is want and need both. As the process of unlocking started and people are still under the threat of the infection; a major section of customers have started opting for online food delivery frequently. Many of the people have started going out to have meals in the F&B outlets; still there are many who prefer food to be delivered to their places in order to feel safer.

Online food delivery is a process that delivers food or takes away from local restaurants through mobile application or through website. This style of food delivery is gaining popularity among young generations and bachelors. The great things are that the customers can generate order without talking or giving any expansion to sellers. Online food delivery has become a billion-dollar business. Aggregator's platforms have expanded all over world through the sale of reliable infrastructure solutions and attractive commission rates for restaurants. Those companies have also gained track over the last years, especially in densely populated regions. Both models will likely converge with stronger competition between in house and third party solutions.

Online food delivery business in India is seeing an everyday rise in its customer's base, a few important factors to it may be:

- Increase in number of working women, no time to cook and dual income
- Increase in the number of mobile phones which ensures easy publicity through social media, and more people are getting accustomed to getting things done via fingertips
- Increasing number of nucleus families in cities
- Rise after pandemic – as the delivery business started again, the business saw new opportunities due to people's changed habits, focus on staying at home etc.
- Some changes post pandemic may be – eating healthy, staying at home, and ordering homely food etc.

Service organization and markets have focused too much of their energy on their core services performance and too little emphasis on designing a customer journey that enhances the entire customer experience. There is nothing wrong with seeking firms to be competitive in the marketplace. The problem occurs when performance levels and service offerings become too similar within an industry, so that price is the only key competitive weapon that remains.

Earlier, the customers moved to restaurants and food retail outlets for food. But with the availability of order delivery services and vehicles now the supply chain is moving in the reverse direction, and the restaurants deliver food to their clients at their home as per their requirement and supply orders. Food aggregators are a unique new feature in the management of the supply chain for fruits, vegetables, ready to eat food and other consumption items. Swiggy, Zomato and Uber eats have emerged as popular aggregators for order delivery. Taking advantage of their presence, restaurants and food businesses have entered into agreements with one or more among these aggregators to ensure speedy and timely supply of food to their clients.

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In recent few years the concept of success and marketing strategy has changed completely due to onset of online order of food through food apps such swiggy, Zomato etc. These apps provide not only choice of food outlets nearby and range of food items but also attractive competitive price among restaurants and promotional discount by the delivery companies. After loading apps in mobiles ordering of food has become so easy that anyone can put order from any place and get fresh food at their door step within a short period of time. This business model has replaced locations of restaurant at primeval condition completely. Now the food outlets in remote and isolated locations where visibility and accessibility were not enough being also doing roaring business.

The study is based on an assumption that as the online food delivery market is growing rapidly and it's adding more people to its customer base every day, some customers may have started taking it as a permanent mode of choosing a food alternative instead of eating-out till the time pandemic threat is there. People who have been constantly ordering even during these times, they would constitute of working professionals who don't live with their family, students, and people in the age group of 15-45.

The study has involved customer groups of different ages/demographics and their food preferences. The study aims to find out whether the online food delivery system is able to win the loyalty of their customers and what dynamic changes the buyers expect in future so as to make it a successful system and a regular choice for the consumer.

In a present online driven environment, convenience is a necessity for young person who take advantage of online delivery process that streamline the ordering and delivery process. Partner with food order delivery services like Zomato, Swiggy, Uber eats etc to push their sale.

A few brands have business plans keeping in mind that home delivery will be the new normal in post-pandemic; and their focus is exclusively on online food deliveries as it would help in minimising personal interaction between the staff and the customers.

2 Objectives

- To study the changes in attitudes of customers towards online food ordering (specific to pandemic times).
- To assess the prominent expectations of customers from online food delivery.

3 Review of literature

Delivering quality to customers in a competitive marketplace dictates the need to continually enhance a customer's experience and satisfaction. However evidence indicates that satisfied customers defect at a high rate in many industries. Brand preference has become an important area of study with the realization that satisfaction alone does not necessarily ensure key customer behaviors such as loyalty. The food service industry needs to explore the combination of good/service attributes that result in an optimal level of customer satisfaction. Alternative customer satisfaction delivery strategies need to be assessed from the perspective of cost/benefits, return on quality, ability of competition to copy a specific strategy, and a firm's ability to deal with raised expectations associated with each strategy.

Dr. S.C.B. Samuel Anbu Selvan, Susan Anita Andrew (2020) Mention that the customers have certain expectations from the online food delivery business, as it is an emerging trend. The business is seeing new rise in growth with the time. There is a need for the food delivery start-ups to consider new business models like Demand Delivery, Cloud Kitchen, Full Stack, and Drone Based Delivery etc.

Dr Mitali Gupta (2019) mentions that the online food delivery is flourishing at a rankling pace, adding to this situation is an expanding number of cell phones and food delivery applications. Online food delivery platforms have become popular with educated potential customers all over India The major benefits of online food delivery are the easy to use apps, flexible payment options, real time tracking, loyalty points and effective customer support.

Mrs. A. Mohanapriya, Mrs. P. Geetha, Mr. A. Prasathkumar (2020) while suggesting that there is high potential in this relatively untapped market, also mentioned that online food delivery service is an emerging market in India the consumer prefers the traditional way of dining in the restaurant. Many of the consumers have online food delivery apps in their mobiles but they place orders only once in a while. During the research they found out that the main reason for which the consumers did not prefer online food was lack of trust. Consumers were afraid of the quality of the packed food.

The brands are engaging in hygiene and quality verification as their first priority and selling tool so much so that some brands are sending hand sanitizers (Gupta, 2019) along with food orders to their clients.

Jabir Tribhuvan (2015) the study told that the majority of respondents are at least eating out once in the month. The respondents are mainly eating out along with friends and family members on special days like holidays etc. By using chi- square analysis the difference in consumer's preferences for eating out has been analysed for family and fast food style restaurants. The study also identified that the preference for eating out was significantly more prominent among those who were younger (<30 years), more educated (preferably graduate in any discipline), employed, and having more than one income earners in their family and belonging to higher income groups of households (>` . 15,000 per month)

Krishna Kumari (2019) finding showed that the online food delivery is taken as a easiest and most preferred way of getting food without being worried about hygiene and other factors. It is also safe and new experience for people who are unable to cook food due to their involvement in their work.

Charlen Li, Miranda Miroso and Phil Bremer (2020), the online Food Delivery industry has been very proactive in the way it develops new markets and cultivates consumers' eating habits.it has key impacts in many ways, like - the Economic impact lies in providing many jobs across a range of types of employment, a social impact is that the online Food Delivery can save time otherwise spent on grocery shopping, cooking or cleaning up afterwards, on environment it has an impact of generating lots of plastic waste and pollution due to delivery vehicles (which is to be dealt by using alternative packaging material and delivery techniques).

4 Research Methodology

The study was conducted online with the target clientele for online food delivery customers . The study is based on two sources of data.

Primary sources: The questionnaire was designed comprising of 10 questions pertained to various possible changes in attitude of customer and to arrive at the prominent expectation of customers in future. Online surveys were conducted to achieve the objectives of the research work. Only the fully filled questionnaires were accepted for data analysis. The respondents were asked to give their opinion regarding various changes in attitude and to highlight the expectation of customers. In all 111 questionnaires were used for data analyzing. Statistical analysis included frequency, averages and percentage.

Secondary sources: Various books, research journal, blogs and website were used to collect secondary data for the research.

5 Data analysis:

The analysis of survey is done by frequency, averages and percentage and relative Importance Index (RII) method. The structured questionnaire was prepared in three parts.

The first part contains the question related to demographic information and information about the nature of the ordering from the online food delivery sites.

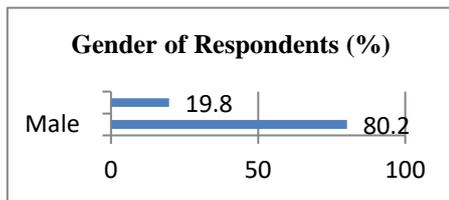
The second part contains the important questions that are relevant in studying the changes in the attitude of customers towards the choosing of products from online food delivery platforms. Such as vegetarian orders, checking customer's comments, frequency of orders packaging material etc. Analysis is done by using Frequency, and percentage for collected responses.

The third part contains the questionnaire based to find the important future expectations of a customer's due to the COVID-19 PANDEMIC which included the key expectations such as food hygiene, staff health, use of local ingredients contact less cooking etc. relative Importance Index (RII) method is used to analyze the responses received

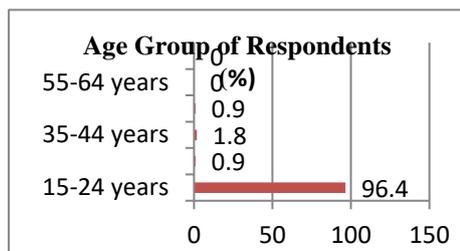
The data received through structured questionnaire was analyzed by Relative importance Index (RII) method to determine the relative importance of 1) the important future expectations of a customer's frequency and percentage was used to find 2). Changes in attitude towards the choosing of products

$$\text{Relative importance of index} = \frac{\text{Sum of weights (W1+W2+W3+.....+Wn)}}{A \times N}$$

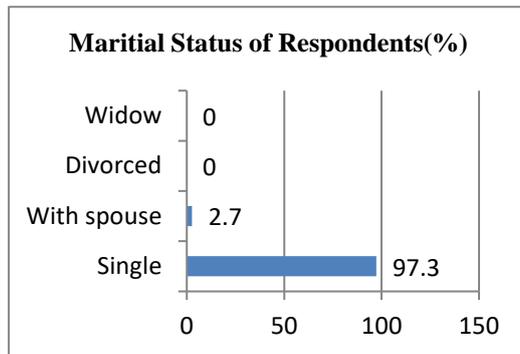
Where W= weights given to each factor by the respondents and will range from 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. A= Highest weight (i.e. 5 in each case) and N= Total number of respondents.



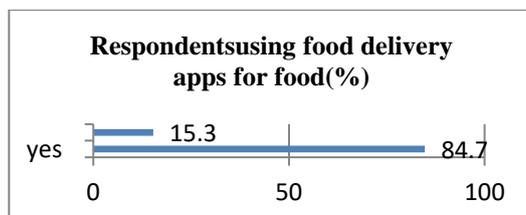
Female	Male
19.8	80.2



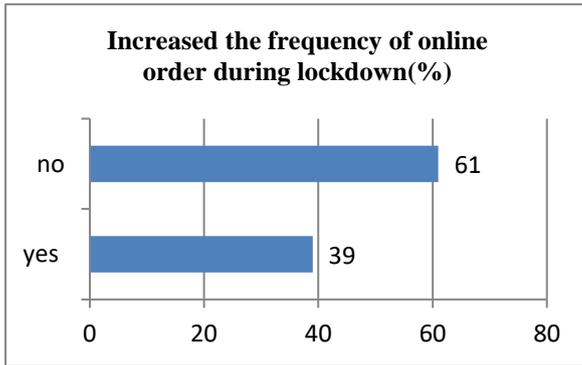
Age Group	Response
15-24	107
25-34	1
34-44	2
45-54	1
55-64	0
65+	0



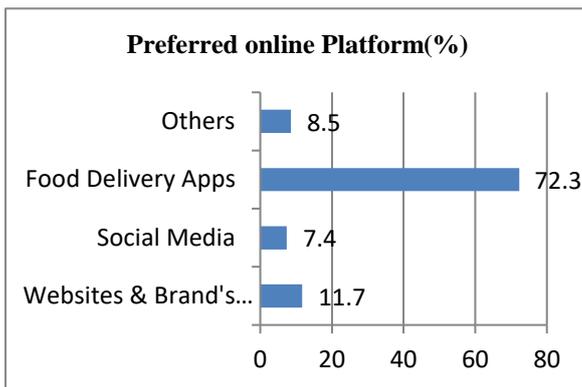
Marital Status	Response
Single	108
With spouse	3
Divorced	0
Widow	0



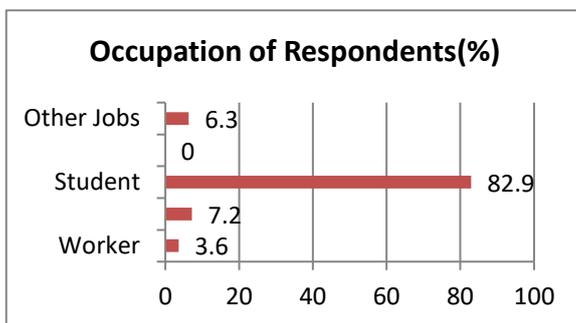
Yes	No
84.7	15.3



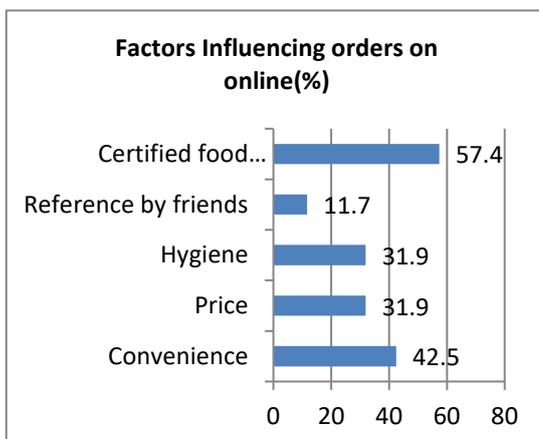
Yes	No
39	61



Preferred online platform	Response
Websites & Brand Apps	11
Social Media	7
Food Delivery Apps	68
Other	8



Occupation	Response
Worker	4
Office	8
Student	92
House Wife	0
Other Jobs	7



Factors Influencing Ordering	Re- sponse
Convenience	40
Price	30
Hygiene By Self Assessment	30
Reference by Friends	11
Certified food Hygiene Faci- ilities and food Source	54

Changes Observed by respondents in their attitudes towards choosing the food products from online market due to pandemic

S. No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree(1)	Disagree(2)	Neutral(3)	Agree(4)	Strongly Agree(5)
1	Switching from Non vegetarian food items to vegetarian food items	33%	18%	19%	18%	12%
2	Ordering hot food instead of food which is served cold	16%	21%	32%	16%	15%
3	Checking views and comments of customers about food before ordering	21%	27%	30%	11%	12%
4	Ensure to look at the high hygiene levels	11%	5%	24%	34%	26%
5	Decreased the frequency of ordering food	11%	12%	27%	32%	19%
6	Started going through the customer complaint handling reviews	9%	5%	13%	23%	50%
7	Inquired about the packaging material of food	12%	13%	36%	21%	18%
8	Started using online payment for my food instead of cash	9%	14%	28%	31%	19%
9	Influenced by those apps which had frequent medical checkups of staff and sharing the information online	14%	4%	26%	24%	32%
10	Opted out of ordering raw food (uncooked) preparations from online apps	9%	13%	22%	22%	34%

Relative Importance Index of Expectations of respondents in future due to COVID-19

Relative importance of index = Sum of weights (1W1+2W2+3W3+4W4+5W5)/AxN

W1= Number of Respondents for Strongly Disagree

W2= Number of Respondents for Disagree

W3= Number of Respondents for Neutral

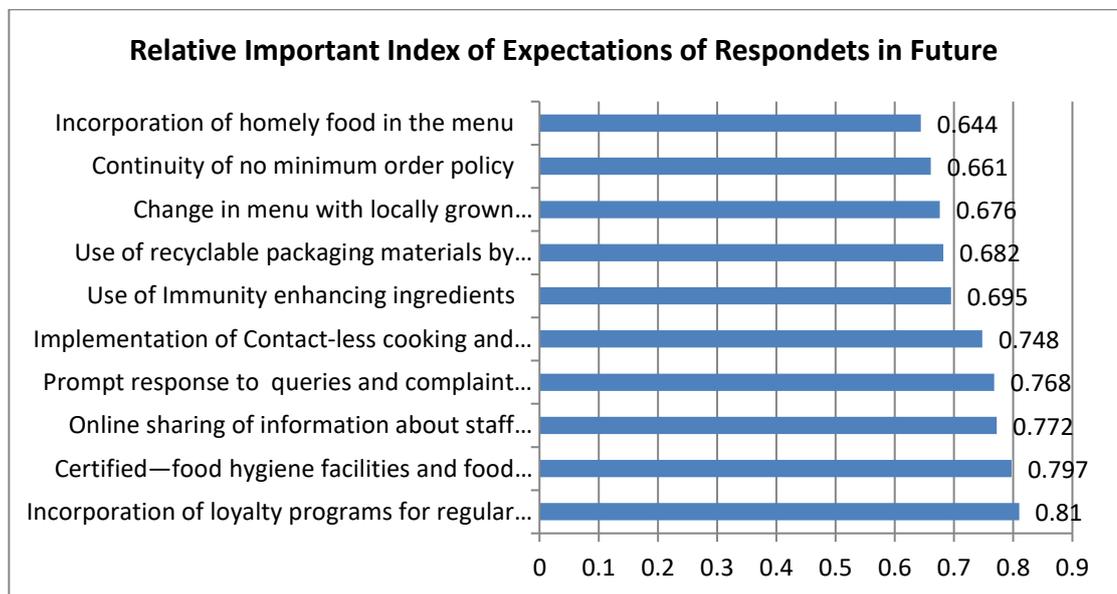
W4= Number of Respondents for Agree

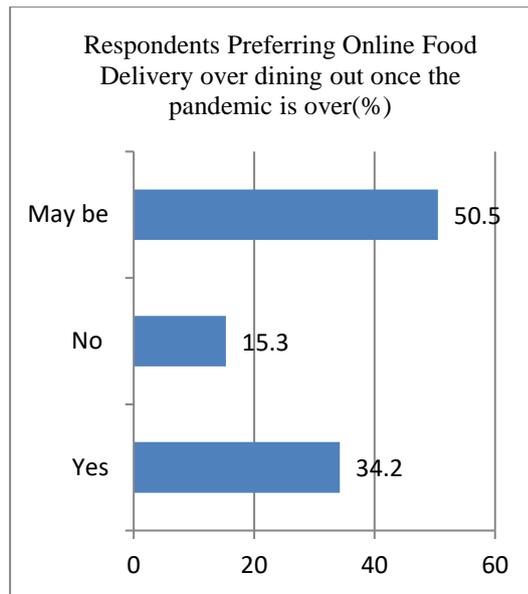
W5= Number of Respondents for Strongly Agree

A (Highest Weight) = 5

N (Total Number of Respondents) =94

Rank	Statements	Relative Important index
1	Incorporation of loyalty programs for regular customer	0.810
2	Certified—food hygiene facilities and food source	0.797
3	Online sharing of information about staff health status	0.772
4	Prompt response to queries and complaint of customers	0.768
5	Implementation of Contact-less cooking and delivery systems	0.748
6	Use of Immunity enhancing ingredients	0.695
7	Use of recyclable packaging materials by online apps	0.682
8	Change in menu with locally grown ingredients	0.676
9	Continuity of no minimum order policy	0.661
10	Incorporation of homely food in the menu	0.644





Yes	No	May be
34.2	15.3	50.5

6 Research findings:

- Majority of respondents fall in age group of 15-24 years which establishes that online food ordering is mainly used by youngster who have more inclination towards readymade and fast food, being friendly with technology is also an important factor with youngsters.
- Out of total respondents who filled up the questionnaire, 84.7% were using the online food delivery apps for food; this indicates that there is untapped market for online food delivery even among the young generation.
- Among the Preferred online platforms Food delivery apps are being used mostly by the respondents which indicate the better reach of food delivery apps to target population.
- During lockdown the prominent factor which influenced the online food delivery as per the responses received is Certified- food hygiene facilities and food source followed by convenience of respondents.
- Change in attitude observed by the respondents due to pandemic, interestingly includes the going through the customer complaint handling reviews and opting out of ordering raw food (uncooked Food) preparations form online apps. This makes us aware that the change in awareness levels of respondents is as per the ongoing situation.
- Relative important Index for the future expectations of the respondents due to COVID-19 is highest for Incorporation of loyalty program for regular customers followed by Certified- food hygiene facilities and food source. The urge of getting hygienic food and rewards for ordering can be clearly seen in response.
- More than 80% of the respondents are positive towards ordering from online food deliver after the pandemic times as well (while one-third of the people being ready to choose it over eating-out); it indicates that the system has been successful in winning the customers trust despite the day to day operational flaws and issues.

7 Conclusion:

This study was conducted with an assumption that online food delivery market is growing rapidly and it's adding more people to its customer's base every day. The findings of the study strongly indicates that the potential and existing customers have changed their attitudes during the covid-19 towards ordering from food apps keeping in view of the reality of staying at home and having very less options for eating favorite foods. Due to this the respondents turned towards the food delivery apps with the expectations of getting food which was prepared as the government guidelines and also was hygienically safe.

The future of food delivery apps depends on their adapting to the customers' demands and designing their products and policies around the ever changing attitude of the customers.

The customer has certain demands from the business always, and a few of the major expectations that were received while undergoing this research were:

- Continuance of providing the hygienic food
- Providing attractive offers to the customers.
- Punctuality in delivering the orders.
- Implementation of contact less delivery system by all the providers.
- Businesses to be more open towards sharing the information of staff hygiene and food cooking methods with customers.
- More flexible hours in terms of ordering the food (if possible, make it 24x7).

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