

The Digital Dining Revolution: Comparative Study of Online and Offline Food Consumption

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Abstract

This paper examines the increasing disparity between eating out versus ordering food online among the Indian consumers. Online food delivery has become part of the contemporary way of life with the emergence of digital applications like Zomato and Swiggy. The study seeks to examine demographic factors, convenience and cost issues as well as behavioral patterns that condition such decisions. The primary data were gathered with the help of the structured survey of 500 respondents, which was facilitated by the secondary data such as the reports in the industry. Findings indicate that convenience, time-saving, and discounts are the greatest factors that have motivated online delivery, whereas ambiance and quality are major factors that have motivated dine-in experiences. The results highlight the presence of a hybrid consumption trend in which the two models co-exist to satisfy various consumer needs.

Keywords: Online food delivery, dine-in, consumer behaviour, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

The urbanization and technology have made people consume food very easily. Food delivery is no longer a luxury and is now a common lifestyle, particularly to the youths and the working population. In the meantime, the classical restaurant business will not lose the customers that wish to socialize and have the food of high quality.

The COVID-19 crisis added to a greater shift toward online ordering of food that contributed to the transformation of the restaurant industry and consumer activity. However, with the world recovering following the pandemic, in-dining experiences are likely to be popular once more in terms of occasion and social occasions. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the tradeoff between these two preferences and the variables that affect them.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To compare consumer preferences in eating out in restaurant and online food delivery.

- To identify the key demographic and behavioral concerns influencing choices.
- To establish the relationship between convenience and price and quality and decision making.
- To understand what has altered in terms of food consumption behavior following the pandemic.
- To recommend on the restaurants and online platforms.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

A. **The young adults (between 18-35) are more inclined to online food delivery than in-restaurant.**

The youthful generation aged 18-35 is the most digital and technologically alert population group. This age group is very familiar with smartphones and mobile apps, as well as online payment systems, and are the main clients of online food delivery services. Their hectic schedules, school or work-related issues and the desire to be convenient, make them opt to place their orders online instead of wasting time in restaurants. Moreover, young adults tend to be more inclined to explore new cuisines and what is offered in delivery applications, which in most cases depends on social media trends and recommendations from peers. Online food delivery websites have, therefore, personalized their marketing, loyalty schemes, and discounts to suit this age group.

B. **Convenience is the key determinant of online food ordering.**

One of the most powerful drivers of the popularity of online food delivery services is convenience. In this busy world, customers now are very conscious of their time and they tend to seek options that can make their lives easier. Online will enable customers to place orders in any restaurant of their choice with the touch of a few buttons without having to travel, wait to be served, or to share a dining table with a large group of people. Such qualities as order tracking in real-time, delivery to the door, a variety of payment options, and customizable menu increase customer satisfaction and strengthen the sense of convenience. This ease of use and convenience has online ordering as a favorite among students, working professionals and even families wanting to enjoy their leisure time without having to go far to order.

C. **The higher the income, the more predisposed to dine-in experience is.**

People enjoying more income tend to prefer more dine in experiences because of the additional value of atmosphere, service quality and social interaction that restaurants offer. Dining out is not just about eating out but also leisure, luxury and lifestyle. Consumers with higher incomes tend to perceive restaurant dining as a type of recreation or status display by visiting high-end restaurants with high quality service and novel culinary experiences. Conversely, evidence suggests that lower- and middle-income citizens are more concerned with affordability and convenience, so online delivery is a more feasible choice. Therefore, income is a major factor, which affects the decision to eat out or order something in.

D. **The food quality is rated higher than the delivery which is rated as dine-in.**

In both dine-in and online environments, the quality of food is a vital aspect of customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, customers tend to view the quality of food in restaurant experiences as better than that of the delivered foods. Food in restaurants is offered immediately at the best temperature so it is well-presented and tastier. Conversely, in online delivery, the food can lose freshness or temperature in the process of its transportation, which can adversely affect the overall experience. Also, online platforms focus on speed, but delays, spillage, or packaging problems can also influence customer attitudes. Thus, although the convenience of delivery is valued, consumers are more likely to rate dine-in experiences higher in the quality of food and overall satisfaction.

E. **The post-pandemic consumption behavior of individuals is shifting towards order placement on the internet.**

A tremendous driving force of shifting consumer eating practices was the COVID-19 pandemic. When restaurants were closed, consumers turned to online food delivery, which became paramount during lockdowns and restrictions, causing the delivery apps to be used by many. This trend has persisted post-pandemic when consumers are now used to the comfort and safety of home delivery. Most restaurants and delivery networks have enhanced their hygiene, contactless delivery options, and digital payments, which

further boosted consumer confidence. In addition, the pandemic exoticized at-home working, virtual meetings, and online entertainment, which do not disagree with web-based food orders. Consequently, a permanent shift in the eating habits, where people lean towards dine in options and online order placement on the basis of convenience, safety, and personal comfort, is experienced.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

F. Type of Study:

Descriptive, comparative research.

G. Data Sources:

Secondary Data:

Sources: Swiggy Consumer Insights, FICCI, and Statista databases, Zomato Annual Reports.

H. Sample Size:

500 respondents.

I. Respondent Profile:

Urban customers aged 18-50: students, working population, housewives.

J. Analysis Tools:

Percentage analysis, bar charts and pie charts were used to represent findings.

5. LIMITATIONS

- Small (500 respondents) sized sample.
- The primary participants were mainly urban, but not rural.
- Self-reported responses are also biased.
- Insufficient time restricted intensive interviews.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.

Demographic Profile

According to Table I, most of the respondents (65) are between 18-25 age group, meaning that young consumers are the most dominant online food delivery consumers. This movement will imply that the main customers of online food delivery services will be tech-savvy and time-conscious young people. This distribution is graphically shown in Fig. 1, indicating that young adults make up the greatest sample.

Category	Segment	Percentage
Age	18-25	65%
Age	26-35	20%
Age	36-50	15%

TABLE.I

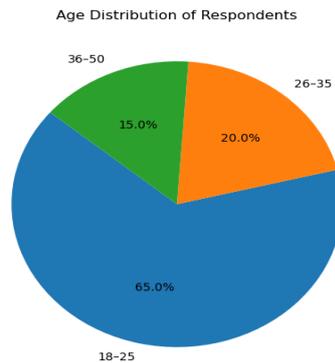


Fig.1. Age Distribution

Table II shows that the two most common occupation groups are the students (55%) and the working professional (30%), and the rest of the population forms 15%. It means that online food delivery trends are significant contributors of both academic and employed people. This finding is supported in Fig. 2 whereby the same occupational breakdown is illustrated in a graphical manner.

Category	Segment	Percentage
Occupation	Students	55%
Occupation	Working Professional	30%
Occupation	Others	15%

TABLE.II

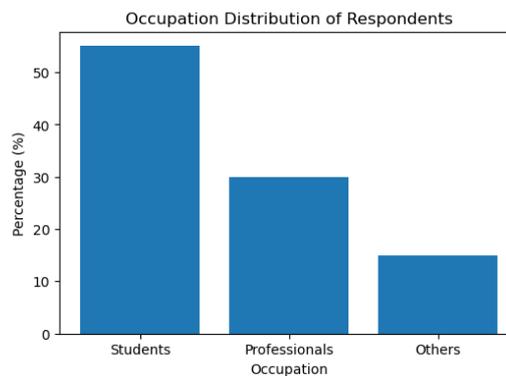


Fig.2. Occupation Distribution

Preference in Dining in vs. Online Delivery.

Table III demonstrates that 70 percent of the respondents are fond of online food delivery and only 30 percent like experiences of restaurants dine-ins. This is a powerful change of behavior to the digital convenience and leaving behind the traditional dining. This comparison is well illustrated in Fig. 3, which demonstrates the increased dominance of online ordering among city consumers.

Preference Type	Percentage
Online Food Delivery	70%
Restaurant Dine In	30%

TABLE.III

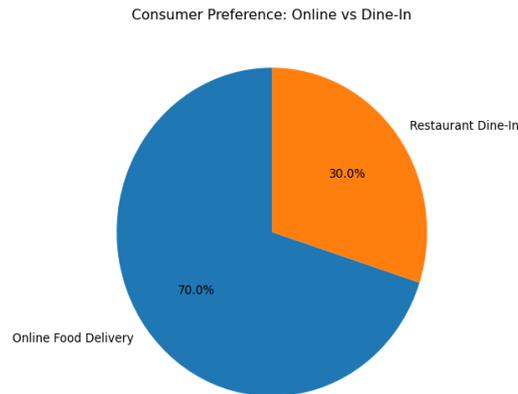


Fig.3. Overall Preference (Online vs Dine-In)

Arguments supporting online food delivery.

Table IV shows that the most important factors that affect the preference of online food delivery are convenience (85%), and time-saving (65%). Other factors, such as offers and discounts (60%), not wanting to be in crowds (40%), and having a choice (35%), are the contributive factors. These factors are presented in a graphical manner in Fig. 4 which confirms that the most important reasons behind digital food ordering are ease of access and time efficiency.

Factor	Percentage
Convenience	85%
Time-Saving	65%
Offers & Discount	60%
Avoiding Crowds	40%
Variety Of Options	35%

TABLE.IV

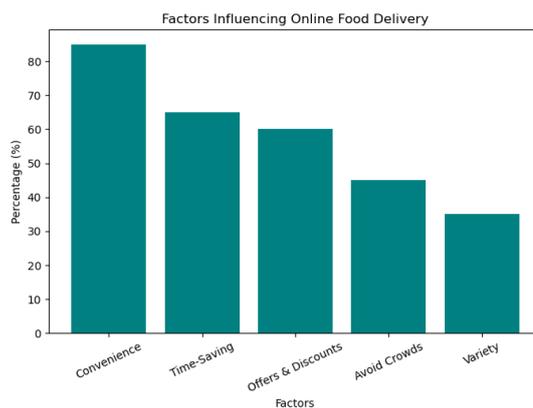


Fig.4. Online Food Delivery Factors

Reasons for Choosing Dine-In

Table V indicates that ambiance and experience (70 percent) are the most important to dine-in customers, and freshness of food comes in next (60 percent), social interaction (50 percent) and the quality of presentation (40 percent). These results prove that restaurant dining remains a great attraction because of the sensory and experience value. These factors are represented in Fig. 5 as ambiance and freshness of

food as the most distinguishing factors in the dine-in experiences.

Factor	Percentage
Ambiance & Experience	70%
Freshness Of Food	60%
Social Interaction	50%
Quality & Presentation	40%

TABLE.V

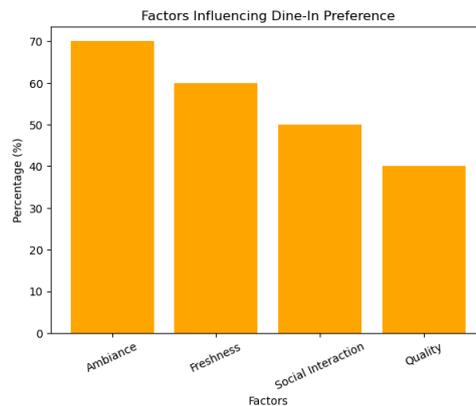


Fig.5. Dine-In Factors

Hypothesis Testing Summary

Proposed	Hypothesis	Confirmed
Young Adult Select Online Delivery	Yes	80% of the interviewees in the age group (18- 25 years old) would like to use online ordering.
Convenience is another key factor	Yes	85% of the respondents found convenience important.
Favors dine-in	No	No strong connection present.
Better quality of dine-in food	Yes	75% rated dine-in food best.
Going online post pandemic	Yes	60% respondents stated that they order more as a result of COVID-19.

TABLE.VI

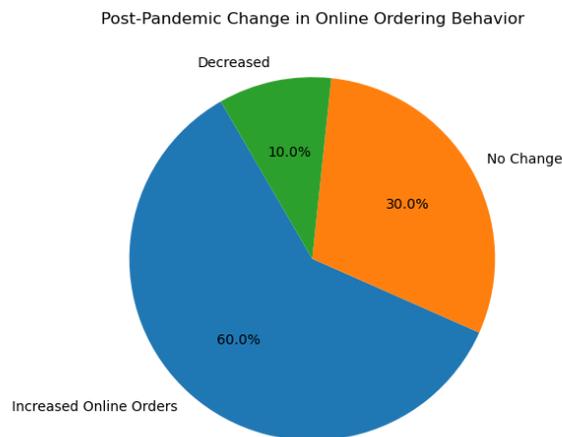


Fig.6. Post-Pandemic Behavioral Shift

The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table VI, and it can be confirmed that young adults (aged 18-25) and convenience are the most effective factors of online food ordering behavior. The first hypothesis was confirmed by approximately 80 percent of the respondents in this age bracket who said that they preferred online ordering. The convenience factor was established by 85 percent of the respondents as a determinant and 75 percent rated dine-in food quality as better than the delivered food. In addition, 60 percent of them reported having increased their frequency of online ordering after the pandemic. Fig. 6 illustratively depicts this behavioral change created due to the post-pandemic lockdown in that online orders increased despite the removal of restrictions.

Summary of Findings

In general, the findings indicate that online delivery has gained popularity among the consumers as a result of convenience, accessibility, and promotional features, however, restaurant food still flourishes among the customers who want to enjoy social interaction and quality of food. Such a combination of the two approaches to food consumption points to a hybrid marketing trend that is developing in post-pandemic India.

7. DISCUSSION

- The data analysis provided in Tables III, IV, and VI and depicted in Figs. 3, 4, and 6 show that there is a set of specific behavioral patterns in the online food delivery and dine-in consumer preferences. The results show that convenience, time and discount are the most significant drivers of the online delivery platform expansion, whereas ambiance, freshness and social contact have remained the main reasons as to why consumers prefer the traditional restaurants.
- Online food delivery has been preferred by 70 percent of respondents, as illustrated in Table III, and this represents a significant change in the consumption patterns of food moving towards the digital platform. Fig. 3 also proves this choice, as the use of online ordering is obviously dominant compared with dine-in. These tendencies indicate the shift in the contemporary culture of dining where technological and comfort in access are paramount factors.
- Table IV shows that the reasons why people prefer to use the internet to order their food were convenience (85) and time-saving (65). Fig. 4 supports these findings with a visual image, with convenience being the best rated of the factors that elevate digital food choices. This is in line with the consumer behavior models which focus on less effort and immediate satisfaction in decision making especially among the working population and the younger generation.

- Simultaneously, Table V shows that ambiance and food freshness are the most important attributes according to dine-in customers. The observation is supported by Fig. 5 that shows ambiance and quality as the most influential dine-in factors. This proves that the restaurants still have a competitiveness edge in terms of customer experience, sensory satisfaction and social engagement, which cannot be fully reproduced through digital platforms.
- Table VI and Fig. 6 have shown clear indications that the COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the use of online food delivery, as 60% of the respondents indicated that they increased their online ordering after the pandemic. These outcomes affirm that convenience, hygiene and safety of online ordering has transformed the consumer behavior to formulate a lasting hybridized consumption model.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online food delivery, as both our survey (Table VI) and industry reports [3], [7], [8] indicate increased consumer reliance on digital platforms during lockdown periods.

- The results align with previous reports, such as the Zomato Annual Report (2024) [1] and IMARC Group) [3], both of which report that there is vast growth in digital food orders by Gen Z and millennial consumers. On the same note, Statista (2024) [4] and Singh (2022) [6] found that affordability and accessibility are factors that determine consumer choice in the fast-paced Indian food industry.
- Therefore it can be concluded that there is two-fold trend of consumption in the present market both online delivery of food due to the convenience and efficiency and in the restaurant due to the experience and quality. This hybrid trend insists on the fact that the two modes do not exclude each other but complement one another, as they address the various consumer motivations in the context and occasion.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Restaurants:

- Guarantee consistency in quality in the dine-in and delivery.
- Work with e-business associates.
- Give loyalty schemes so as to retain hybrid customers.

For Delivery Platforms:

- Improve the packaging so that the food can be fresh.
- Deliveries should be fast and reliable by maximizing logistics.
- Introduce healthy and sustainable products.

9. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that consumer preferences for food consumption channels are not antagonistic but rather complementary. Online food delivery continues to gain traction due to its convenience, accessibility, and promotional benefits, whereas dine-in experiences remain highly valued for their freshness, ambiance, and social-sensory engagement. The findings highlight that consumers are motivated to order online primarily for ease and attractive offers, while the experiential dimension of dining out sustains its popularity. Furthermore, post-pandemic behavioral shifts have permanently expanded the digital food delivery market, indicating that technology-enabled consumption is now integrated into everyday routines. Overall, the results suggest that both restaurants and delivery platforms must strategically balance speed, quality, and customer experience to cater to evolving lifestyle expectations and maintain competitiveness in a hybrid dining landscape.

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