



Online Food Purchasing Habit among the Hostel Students in Anand City, Gujarat, India

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the online food delivery consumption patterns among college students in Anand City, focusing on the influence of area of residence (rural vs. urban) on purchasing behavior. Data collected from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire reveals significant differences in frequency and preferences between rural and urban users. While awareness of online food delivery services is high (94%), urban respondents demonstrate a higher tendency for frequent purchases compared to rural counterparts, with weekly and monthly orders being more common in urban areas. Platforms like Swiggy and Zomato dominate the market, preferred for their reliability and variety, whereas other services see minimal usage. Fast delivery, discounts, and reasonable pricing emerge as key factors influencing purchase decisions. Despite growing acceptance, a significant portion of respondents still prefer cooking at home or dining out, primarily due to concerns about food quality, hygiene, and delivery costs. Payment preferences reveal a strong inclination toward digital payments, especially UPI, with cash on delivery remaining popular. Customer satisfaction is highest for Swiggy and Zomato, while other platforms lag behind.

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Respondents emphasize the need for improvements in delivery charges, food quality, and service speed to enhance the overall experience. The study highlights the evolving food consumption landscape in Anand, emphasizing the growing importance of online food delivery while underscoring challenges related to affordability, trust, and service quality.

Keywords: *Online food purchasing; frequency of purchase; area of residence; rural vs. urban consumers; consumer behavior; chi-squared test.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The online food delivery industry in India has undergone rapid growth over the past decade, driven by factors such as increased smartphone penetration, widespread internet access, and changing consumer lifestyles (Meenakshi & Sinha, 2019; Saxena, 2019). Platforms like Zomato, Swiggy, Domino's, and others have reshaped how people order and consume food. With urbanization and busy work schedules, consumers increasingly prefer the convenience and variety offered by these services. Nonetheless, even when they are popular, operational expenses, quality, trust of customers, and logistics efficiency are still challenges. This section discusses significant literature that examines different facets of the Indian online food delivery market, consumer attitudes, and what drives its adoption and sustainability in India (Singh et al., 2024). Meenakshi and Sinha (2019) highlighted that successful food delivery apps in India prioritize customer engagement, digital innovation, and localized strategies.

The Indian online food ordering industry has picked up strongly, propelled mainly by apps such as Zomato and Swiggy. These apps have ridden the wave of technology, changing lifestyles, and the increasing need for convenience (Regmi, 2023). A study of the attitudes and behavioral plans of consumers confirms that these apps are popularly used due to the simplicity of use, choice of options, and affordable prices. Nevertheless, research emphasizes that the intention of the consumers is not driven by convenience alone but rather by aspects such as delivery speed, quality of food, price, and the overall customer experience. The capacity of the platforms to directly respond to these variables significantly influences user retention and loyalty, which are key to maintaining growth in a competitive market. Gupta and Duggal (2021) emphasized that consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward food delivery apps are largely shaped by trust, ease of use, and perceived convenience.

Consumer satisfaction at peak times, like the COVID-19 lockdown, also highlighted the significance of food delivery platforms online. Studies indicate that throughout the pandemic, university students and other consumers greatly depended on such platforms owing to restrictions on going out to eat. The study emphasizes that satisfaction and loyalty were facilitated by the likes of safety protocols, contactless delivery, and the capacity to meet pressing needs. By dealing with these issues, sites such as Zomato and Swiggy were able to retain customers and earn trust during times of uncertainty. According to Katoch and Sidhu (2021), customer satisfaction in the online food delivery industry depends heavily on timely delivery, complaint handling, and consistent service. Pal et al. (2022) found that during the COVID-19 lockdown, university students relied heavily on food delivery apps, valuing safety protocols and reliability the most.

The customer satisfaction dynamics in the business of online food delivery also highlight the need for personalized marketing and customer-focused strategies. Singh et al. (2024) found that satisfaction among hostel students using food delivery services directly influences their dietary choices and repeat usage. Indian market studies indicate that platforms have succeeded in delivering convenience, but high delivery charges, variable service quality, and absence of pricing transparency end up causing dissatisfaction among customers. Meeting these needs through initiatives such as clear pricing, loyalty schemes, and more reliable delivery has been crucial in order to ensure ongoing customer satisfaction. Saxena (2019) analyzed that Zomato and Swiggy gained market leadership through strong branding, user-friendly interfaces, and targeted advertising.

The success of food ordering apps in India can be accredited to a combination of innovative marketing, innovation, and agility. Leverage of data analytics and AI to tailor user experiences, along with aggressive promotion campaigns, has enabled platforms to capture the market. Withstanding the tough competition, platforms

such as Zomato and Swiggy have been able to stay ahead by continuously changing their services to accommodate customers' demands. Yet, issues like cost of operations, regional competition, and retention of customers are still crucial ones necessitating platforms to keep innovating and changing strategy in order to maintain growth.

1.1 Research Objective

1. To examine the correlation between how often food is bought online and location of residence (rural vs. urban).
2. To contrast rural and urban respondents' purchasing behavior by frequency categories (daily, weekly, monthly, seldom, and never).
3. To ascertain the degree to which urban respondents record higher levels of online food buying frequency than rural respondents.
4. To examine whether the place of residence has an effect on respondents' food ordering behavior online.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The relevant data for the research study was collected by using a primary survey done by a questionnaire. The questionnaire was filled out by respondents using Google Forms. In the present study, there were around 100 number of respondents. Respondents were students and they were randomly selected from colleges in Anand City. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents from Colleges of Anand City were surveyed, covering various aspects such as age, gender, educational level, occupation of family, monthly family income, health consciousness and Area of residence.

3.1.1 Age distribution

The age distribution shows a concentration in the younger age groups. The largest age group was 18-22 years, making up 72% of the total respondents. This was followed by those 23-27 years (15%), those aged Below 18 (10%). and those aged Above 27 years (3%).

3.1.2 Gender distribution

The gender distribution of the respondents indicates a significantly higher numbers of males compared to females. Males constituted 84% of the total sample, while Females accounted for 16%.

3.1.3 Educational qualification

Respondents' educational qualifications were divided into three categories. The majority of respondents were undergraduates, comprising 74% of the total, while postgraduates accounted for 33% and only Doctorates accounted for 4%.

3.1.4 Area of residence

Respondents' area of residence was divided into two categories. Rural 59% & Urban 41%.

3.1.5 Monthly family income

Monthly family income was categorized into Four brackets. The most common income bracket was 50000 - 100000 INR, representing 38% of the respondents. The second most common income range was 10000 - 50000 INR, comprising 35% of respondents. The income ranges of Above 100000 INR (16%), and Below 10000 INR (11%) followed.

3.1.6 Health consciousness

Health conscious was categorized into five brackets. The most common health consciousness bracket was Conscious, representing 43% of the respondents. The second most common health consciousness range Moderate, comprising 37% of respondents. The health consciousness ranges of Highly conscious (20%), and other two bracket was zero percent.

3.1.7 Awareness of online food delivery services available in Anand

The Table indicates that 94% of respondents are aware of online food delivery services available in Anand city. This is a significant proportion, highlighting the widespread recognition of such services in the area. Only 6% of respondents are not aware of online food delivery services in Anand city, demonstrating their limited reach among a small segment of the population.

The awareness of online food delivery services in Anand city is depicted in the Table.

3.2 Frequency of Purchasing Food Online

Table 8 illustrates the frequency of online food purchases among 100 respondents. The majority of respondents (55.32%) reported that they rarely

purchase food online, followed by 19.15% who do so monthly. Only 11.70% purchase food online weekly, while daily purchases are minimal at 4.26%. Additionally, 15.96% of respondents stated they never buy food online. This indicates that online food purchasing is relatively infrequent among the surveyed individuals.

Table 1. Age wise distribution of respondent (n=100)

Sr No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	Below 18	10	10
2	18-22	72	72
3	23-27	15	15
4	Above 27	3	3
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 2. Gender Wise Distribution of Respondent (n=100)

Sr No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	84	84
2	Female	16	16
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 3. Educational wise distribution of respondent (n=100)

Sr No.	Educational	Frequency	Percentage
1	Undergraduate	74	74
2	Postgraduate	22	22
	Doctorate	4	4
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 4. Area Wise Distribution of Respondent (n=100)

Sr No.	Area	Frequency	Percentage
1	Rural	59	59
2	Urban	41	41
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 5. Monthly family income Wise Distribution of Respondent (n=100)

Sr No.	Family Income (Monthly) (in Rupees)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Below 10000	11	11
2	10000 - 50000	35	35
3	50000 - 100000	38	38
4	Above 100000	16	16
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 6. Health consciousness of respondents (n=100)

Sr No.	Health consciousness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Highly conscious	20	20
2	Conscious	43	43
3	Moderate	37	37
4	Not conscious	0	0
5	Not at all conscious	0	0
Total		100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 7. Awareness of online food delivery services of respondents (n=100)

Sr No.	Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	94	94
2	No	6	6
Total		100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 8. Frequency of purchasing food online of respondents (n=94)

Sr no.	Time of Purchasing	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily	4	4.26
2	Weekly	11	11.70
3	Monthly	18	19.15
4	Rarely	52	55.32
5	Never	15	15.96
Total		94	100

Source: Primary data

3.3 Awareness vs. Area of Residence

A survey was conducted to analyze the relationship between awareness and the area of residence (rural or urban). The data revealed that out of 94 aware respondents, 55 were from rural areas and 39 were from urban areas. Similarly, among 6 not aware respondents, 4 were rural, and 2 were urban. A chi-squared test was applied to determine whether awareness is dependent on the area of residence.

The calculated χ^2 value was 0.155 (df = 1, $p > 0.05$), which is significantly lower than the critical value of 3.841 at the 5% significance level. Thus, there is no significant relationship between awareness and the area of residence. Awareness appears to be independent of whether respondents reside in rural or urban areas.

3.4 Analysis of Frequency of Purchasing Food Online by Area of Residence

The analysis reveals that rural respondents (55 out of 94) are less frequent purchasers of food

online, with the majority (63.64%) purchasing rarely. In contrast, urban respondents show a relatively higher tendency toward weekly (20.51%) and monthly (28.21%) purchases. While daily online food purchases are minimal in both groups, rural areas have a higher share of those who never purchase food online (14.55%) compared to urban areas (7.69%). Overall, the data suggests that urban residents are more engaged in regular online food purchasing than their rural counterparts.

A chi-squared test was conducted to determine if purchasing frequency depended on the area of residence. The test yielded $\chi^2=12.394$ ($df = 4$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a significant relationship. Thus, purchasing frequency is dependent on whether respondents reside in rural or urban areas.

3.5 Preference for Online Food Delivery & Dining Out

The data shows that 40% of respondents do not prefer online food delivery over dining out, while an equal proportion (40%) prefer it only sometimes. Only 20% of respondents

consistently prefer online food delivery. This suggests that while there is some interest in online food delivery, traditional dining out remains more favored or equally preferred by most respondents.

3.6 Frequency of Online Food Purchases Across Platforms

The data shows varying levels of usage across different online food platforms. The data indicates that Swiggy and Zomato are the most frequently used platforms for online food purchases, with Swiggy showing the highest number of weekly (10) and monthly (14) users, followed by Zomato with 23 monthly and 5 weekly users. Other platforms like Zepto, Blinkit, Amul Green, and La Pinoz are rarely or never used by the majority of respondents, as indicated by high "Never" frequencies (e.g., Zepto: 82, Blinkit: 73). This suggests that food delivery aggregators like Swiggy and Zomato have significantly higher market penetration and usage compared to brand-specific or grocery-based platforms among the respondents.

3.7 Frequency of Different Food Types Ordered Online

The data reveals diverse preferences for online food orders across different categories. Among various food types ordered online, Pizza and Burgers are the most frequently ordered, with Pizza having the highest share of monthly (16) and weekly (9) orders. Other popular items include Paubhaji and Indian Cuisine, though these are ordered less frequently and are marked by higher "Rarely" and "Never" responses. Food categories such as Mag Pulav, Chinese Dishes, Desserts/Beverages, and Health/Fitness Food show low regular ordering and a high percentage of never

ordered responses (over 60%). This suggests that fast food items like pizza and burgers dominate online food preferences, while traditional or niche food items are less frequently ordered.

3.8 Preferred Payment Methods for Online Food Orders

The data highlights the preferred payment methods for online food orders. The most preferred payment method among respondents is UPI (e.g., GPay, PhonePe), used by 65 out of 94 respondents. This is followed by Cash on Delivery, preferred by 49 respondents. Credit/Debit cards are used by very few (4 respondents), and another 4 respondents reported not using any payment method, possibly indicating non-users of online food services. The data highlights a clear shift toward digital payments, especially UPI, for online food transactions. This suggests that digital payment methods, particularly UPI, have become the dominant mode of transaction, though cash remains a substantial alternative.

3.9 Average Monthly Spending on Online Food Orders

The majority of respondents (65%) spend less than ₹500 per month on online food orders, while 23% spend between ₹500 and ₹1,000. Notably, no respondents reported spending between ₹1,001 and ₹2,000, and only 6% spend more than ₹2,000 monthly. This indicates that most users keep their online food expenses relatively low, suggesting either infrequent ordering or preference for budget-friendly options. This suggests that while many people use online food delivery services, most are spending modestly, with high-spending habits being relatively uncommon.

Table 9 Awareness vs. Area of Residence for Purchasing Food Online of respondents (n=94)

Area of Residence	Aware respondents	Frequency
Rural	55	58.51
Urban	39	41.49
Total	94	100

Source: Primary data

Table 10. Analysis frequency of purchasing food online by area of residence (n=94)

Area of Residence	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never	Total
Rural	2	3	7	35	8	2
Urban	2	8	11	15	3	2
Total	3	12	18	52	15	100

Source: Primary data

Table 11. Study of preference for online food delivery & dining out (n=100)

Sr No.	Time of Purchasing	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	20	20
2	No	40	40
3	Sometimes	40	40
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Table 12. Frequency of online food purchases across platforms (n=94)

Sr. no.	Online Platforms	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
1	ZEPTO	3	1	1	13	82
2	SWIGGY	2	10	14	48	26
3	ZOMATO	3	5	23	56	16
4	BLINK IT	3	1	6	56	73
5	DOMINO'S	2	5	7	34	52
6	AMUL GREEN	3	0	2	14	81
7	LA PINOZ	3	3	8	24	62
8	Other online application	3	1	2	15	69

Source: Primary data

Table 13. Frequency of Different Food Types Ordered Online (n=94)

Sr. no.	Type of food	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
1	Pizza	4	9	16	41	30
2	Burgers	2	8	14	44	32
3	Paubhaji	4	2	11	31	52
4	Mag pulau	2	6	8	21	63
5	Chainies Dishes	3	4	8	15	70
6	Indian Cuisine	5	2	13	20	60
7	Desserts/Beverages	4	4	7	23	62
8	Health/Fitness Food	4	2	8	19	67

Source: Primary data

Table 14. Preferred payment methods for online food orders (n=94)

Sr. no.	Payment Methods	Frequency
1	Cash on Delivery	49
2	UPI (Gpay, Phone Pay, Other...)	65
3	Credit card/ Debit card	4
4	No	4

Source: Primary data

Table 15. Average monthly spending on online food orders (n=94)

Sr. no.	Spend On Online Food Orders	Frequency	Percentage
1	Less than ₹500	70	65
2	₹500 - ₹1,000	24	23
3	₹1,001 - ₹2,000	0	0
4	More than ₹2,000	6	6

Source: Primary data

3.10 Preferred Time of Day for Placing Online Food Orders

The majority of respondents prefer to place online food orders during dinner time (56),

followed by late-night snacks (40). Lunch is the next most popular time (23), while fewer respondents order during evening snacks (19) and breakfast (10). This suggests that dinner and late-night snacking are the peak times for online

food ordering among the surveyed group. This suggests that dinner and late-night snacks are the peak times for online food orders. Trivedi et al. (2024) demonstrated that local consumer trust in brands like Amul significantly influences product selection and frequency of use in regional markets.

3.11 Factors Influencing the Decision to Purchase Food Online

The data highlights several factors that influence online food purchasing decisions. The most influential factor in deciding to purchase food online is fast delivery (48 respondents), followed by discounts/offers (42) and reasonable price (33). Other notable factors include variety of food options (29), convenience and food quality and hygiene (both 26), as well as loyalty/preferences (20) and rewards (18). This indicates that speed, cost savings, and promotions strongly impact online food buying decisions. This suggests that customers prioritize speed, affordability, and diverse options when choosing to order food online.

3.12 Customer Satisfaction with Online Food Delivery Platforms

The data indicates varying levels of customer satisfaction across online food delivery platforms. Among the platforms, Zomato and Swiggy have the highest levels of customer satisfaction, with 54% and 46% of respondents rating them as satisfied or very satisfied respectively. In contrast, platforms like Zepto, Blink It, Domino's, Amul Green, and Other online applications have a higher proportion of respondents who are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, indicating lower overall satisfaction. Many respondents remain neutral across most platforms, but Zomato and Swiggy clearly lead in customer approval. This suggests that Swiggy and Zomato lead in customer satisfaction, while other platforms struggle to meet user expectations.

3.13 Desired Improvements in Online Food Delivery Services

The data highlights key areas where users would like to see improvements in online food delivery services. Respondents primarily desire lower delivery charges (49), followed closely by requests for better food quality (44) and faster delivery (42). Additionally, more discounts/offers and transparent pricing are also important improvements sought by customers, with 37 respondents each indicating these needs. These highlights cost and service efficiency as key areas for enhancing customer satisfaction in online food delivery, suggesting that most feedback focuses on affordability, speed, and quality. These insights indicate a demand for services that balance cost-effectiveness with reliability and quality.

3.14 Reasons for Not Purchasing Online Food

The data reveals that The primary reasons for not purchasing food online are a preference for cooking or eating homemade food (46%) and concerns about food quality and hygiene (42%). Other significant factors include perceiving online food as expensive (33%) and high delivery charges (35%). Trust issues with online platforms (17%), long delivery times (19%), and a preference for dining out or takeaway (26%) also contribute. A smaller number of respondents cited unfamiliarity with online ordering (9%) and past bad experiences (13%) as reasons. This suggests that both cost and quality concerns, along with personal habits, influence reluctance toward online food purchases. These findings suggest that cost, trust, and quality are key barriers for potential users of online food delivery services. Regmi (2023) observed that hostel students' fast food preferences are often driven by price sensitivity and peer influence rather than nutritional-value.

Table 16. Preferred Time of Day for Placing Online Food Orders (n=94)

Sr. no.	Time of Day	Frequency
1	Breakfast	10
2	Lunch	23
3	Dinner	56
4	Late-night snacks	40
5	Evening Snacks	19

Source: Primary data

Table 17. Study of Factors Influencing the Decision to Purchase Food Online (n=94)

Sr. no.	Decision to Purchase	Frequency
1	Convenience	26
2	Reasonable price	33
3	Loyalty / Preference	20
4	Reward	18
5	Discounts/Offers	42
6	Variety of food options	29
7	Fast delivery	48
8	Food Quality and Hygiene	26

Source: Primary data

Table 18. Customer satisfaction with online food delivery platforms (n=94)

Sr. no.	Platforms	very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	neutral	satisfied	Very satisfied
1	Zepto	27	13	36	10	8
2	Swiggy	14	7	27	32	14
3	Zomato	12	12	16	34	20
4	Blink It	26	15	31	17	5
5	Domino's	25	12	32	16	9
6	Amul Green	23	11	39	13	8
7	La Pinoz	22	13	33	14	12
8	Other online application	31	9	39	9	6

Source: Primary data

Table 19. Desired improvements in online food delivery services (n=94)

Sr. no.	Improvements	No.
1	Better food quality	44
2	Faster delivery	42
3	Lower delivery charges	49
4	More discounts/offers	37
5	Transparent Pricing	37

Source: Primary data

Table 20. Reasons for not purchasing online food (n=100)

Sr. no.	Particular	No.
1	I prefer cooking or eating homemade food.	46
2	I am concerned about food quality and hygiene.	42
3	I find online food expensive.	33
4	Delivery charges are too high.	35
5	I do not trust online platforms.	17
6	The delivery time is too long.	19
7	I prefer dining out or takeaway.	26
8	I am not familiar with online food ordering platforms.	9
9	I had bad experiences with online food orders in the past.	13
10	Other	4

Source: Primary data

4. SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The survey collected data from 100 participants, mostly college students from Anand City, in order

to determine their demographic profiles, awareness, preferences, and behavior with regard to online food delivery services. Most of the participants were young (72% between 18-22 years), mostly male (84%), and mostly

undergraduates (74%). A majority lived in rural areas (59%), with varying family income levels and moderate to high health awareness.

Online food delivery service awareness was extremely high at 94%, reflecting widespread recognition within the region. Actual usage frequency diverged, however, with 55% buying online occasionally and 16% never buying food online. Urban respondents showed considerably greater frequency of buying food online when compared to rural counterparts.

Swiggy and Zomato were the leading platforms, showing higher market penetration and customer affinity, while Zepto and Blinkit were the least used platforms. Fast foods like burgers and pizzas were the online food items most ordered, particularly in the evening and late-night hours.

UPI was the favourite mode of payment, reflecting a shift towards online transactions, although cash on delivery was also liked. The majority of respondents spent little on food ordered online, with 65% of them spending less than ₹500 per month.

The most important drivers for online food ordering decisions were quick delivery, offers/discounts, fair price, and variety of dishes. Customer satisfaction was highest with Swiggy and Zomato, while the rest of the platforms scored mixed or low ratings. Respondents indicated strong demand for upgrading delivery fees, food quality, and speed of delivery. As supported by Rathwa et al. (2024), purchasing patterns are shaped by product affordability and the availability of discounts, which aligns with this study's findings.

Amongst those who did not buy food online, major reasons were preference for home-made food, issues related to food quality and hygiene, and beliefs of high price and delivery fees. Issues related to trust and previous negative experiences also played a part in non-uptake.

5. CONCLUSION

The research reveals greater awareness of food delivery services online in Anand City, with 94% being aware of the same. But usage is limited, particularly in rural areas where frequency of purchases is lower than in urban areas. Swiggy and Zomato lead the way with greater customer satisfaction and regular usage. Fast delivery, affordable prices, and offers heavily impact food purchases online. The majority of consumers prefer online payments, specifically UPI, when

spending small amounts of money on a monthly basis. Although interest is rising, most respondents continue to prefer homemade food because of quality, hygiene, and price apprehensions. To boost adoption, online food services need to concentrate on better food quality, lower delivery fees, and speedier deliveries. Higher trust and transparency will play a critical role in converting reluctant users. Drawing parallels from the dairy industry, Mogha et al. (2013) stressed that digital communication tools such as instant messengers can enhance service efficiency in food delivery as well. In all, although online food delivery is increasing, focusing on affordability, quality, and reliability of service is still the way to gain more market share in Anand City.

CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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