

USER DIFFICULTIES AND SERVICE GAPS IN ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY PLATFORMS

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Abstract

The study examines user difficulties and service gaps in online food delivery platforms among customers in the Thiruvananthapuram district. The findings reveal that Swiggy is the most preferred application, while high delivery charges and late deliveries are the major customer concerns. Product-related issues, such as stale food and unhygienic practices, were reported at a low level. The study also found no significant difference in customer issues across age groups, while female customers experienced greater difficulty in order tracking. The study suggests improving delivery efficiency, refund systems, order accuracy, tracking facilities, and customer support to enhance customer satisfaction and service quality.

Keywords:- Online Food Delivery, Order Tracking, Food Delivery Apps, E-Service Quality.

The rapid growth of online food delivery platforms has significantly transformed consumer food consumption patterns in India, especially in Kerala, due to the increasing use of smartphones, internet services, and digital payment systems. Platforms such as Swiggy and Zomato have enhanced convenience by enabling

users to browse menus, compare prices, and order food from a variety of restaurants from the comfort of their homes. Despite their popularity, users often face challenges such as delayed deliveries, inaccurate orders, poor food quality, hidden charges, app crashes, payment failures, and inadequate customer service, which highlight gaps in

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e-service quality dimensions like efficiency, responsiveness, fulfilment, and system reliability. In Kerala, where digital adoption and consumer expectations are high, these issues become more significant and also raise concerns regarding pricing, service consistency, and stakeholder welfare.

Against this background, the present study on “User Difficulties and Service Gaps in Online Food Delivery Platforms” aims to examine the major challenges faced by users and identify gaps in service delivery in order to provide insights for improving service quality and customer satisfaction.

Literature Review

The literature on online food delivery platforms highlights the transformative role of technology in reshaping the food service industry through enhanced convenience, accessibility, and customer engagement. Studies reveal that the transition from traditional ordering methods to app-based services such as Swiggy and Zomato has significantly influenced consumer behaviour and intensified market competition. G. See Kwong (2017) noted that technological advancements have accelerated the growth of online food delivery systems in India by improving efficiency and customer convenience. Kapoor and Vij (2018) identified mobile application attributes such as visual design, navigational efficiency, information quality, and collaboration features as important determinants of customer choice and conversion. Peter Suchánek et al. (2019) emphasized the relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty, product

knowledge, and competitiveness, while Thamaraiselvan et al. (2019) highlighted the impact of smartphone penetration, flexible payment systems, and digital applications on the widespread adoption of online food delivery services. Further, Chanin Yoopetch et al. (2022) found perceived value, delivery efficiency, menu variety, and food quality to be major contributors to customer satisfaction, whereas Choi J.C. (2020) stressed the importance of technological ease, reliability, and service efficiency in mobile food delivery applications. Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that service quality, app functionality, and perceived value are crucial for customer satisfaction and loyalty; however, limited research has focused on specific customer problems and service deficiencies in regional contexts such as Kerala.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of online food delivery platforms such as Swiggy and Zomato has revolutionized the way consumers access food services, offering convenience, variety, and time efficiency. However, this growth has been accompanied by a range of user difficulties that adversely affect the overall service experience. Customers frequently report issues such as delayed deliveries, incorrect or missing orders, inconsistent food quality, hidden charges, and inadequate customer support. In addition, technical glitches, payment failures, and lack of transparency in pricing and delivery timelines further widen the gap between user expectations and actual service delivery. These recurring problems indicate significant deficiencies in key dimensions of e-service quality, including

reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. Despite the widespread use of these platforms, there remains a lack of systematic understanding of the nature and extent of these user difficulties and the underlying service gaps. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine and analyze these issues in order to identify areas for improvement and enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of online food delivery services.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the most preferred online food delivery applications among customers.
2. To analyse the issues faced by customers while using online food delivery platforms.

Methodology adopted for the Study

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to identify the issues faced by customers of online food delivery platforms. Primary data were collected from customers using online food delivery services through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were gathered from sources such as the State Food Commission of Kerala, journals, articles, and theses. The study was conducted over six months from June to November 2025 among 65 customers in the Thiruvananthapuram district who use online food delivery services. The sample unit consisted of individuals who ordered food through online delivery apps, and respondents were selected using the convenience sampling method. The collected data were coded, classified, and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive

statistical tools such as percentages, mean, and median were used for analysis, while the Kruskal–Wallis H test, Mann–Whitney U test, and Friedman’s test for K-related samples were applied for hypothesis testing.

Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of online food delivery customers reveals that the majority of respondents (50.8 per cent) belong to the age group of 25–45 years, indicating that middle-aged individuals are the primary users of online food delivery platforms. Young customers below 25 years constitute 32.3 per cent, while only 16.9 per cent are above 45 years, showing comparatively lower usage among older individuals. The gender distribution is almost balanced, with females accounting for 50.8 per cent and males 49.2 per cent, indicating equal participation of both genders in using online food delivery services. With regard to occupation, government employees form the largest group of users (44.6 per cent), followed by students (26.2 per cent) and self-employed individuals (20 per cent), whereas unemployed respondents represent only 9.2 per cent. Overall, the table indicates that online food delivery platforms are widely used by working-age individuals, particularly government employees, with balanced gender participation among customers.

MostFrequentlyUsedApps

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the frequency of customers’ usage of online food delivery applications, with scores ranging from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Very Frequently”). The one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to

Table1
Demographic Profile of the Customers

Basis	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	Below25 Years	21	32.3
	25-45	33	50.8
	Above45 Years	11	16.9
	Total	65	100.0
Gender	Male	32	49.2
	Female	33	50.8
	Total	65	100.0
Occupation	Student	17	26.2
	Govt. Employees	29	44.6
	Self-employed	13	20.00
	Unemployed	6	9.2
	Total	65	100

Source: Primary Data

determine whether the median response significantly differed from the hypothesized test value of 3, which represented the midpoint of the scale.The hypotheses considered are:

H0: The frequency of using online food delivery apps is equal to the average level.

H1:The frequency of using online food delivery apps is not equal to the average level.

Since the p-values for all applications are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 5 per cent level of significance. This indicates that the frequency of usage of the selected online food delivery applications significantly differs from the average level. Among the applications, Swiggy recorded the highest mean score (3.42), indicating that it is the most frequently used application among respondents. On the other hand, the mean scores of Zomato, KFC and Pizza Hut were found to be below the average level,

indicating comparatively lower frequency of usage. The findings therefore reveal a clear preference hierarchy among online food delivery applications, with Swiggy emerging as the most preferred platform among the respondents.

Problems Faced by Customers

A three-point Likert scale was used to measure the problems faced by customers, with scores ranging from 1 (“No Problem”) to 3 (“Severe Problem”). The One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was applied to examine whether the median response significantly differed from the hypothesized test value of 2, which represented the midpoint of the scale. The hypotheses considered are:

H0: Problems of customers in online food delivery services are equal to the average level.

H1:Problems of customers in online food delivery services are not equal to the averagel evel.

Table 2
Frequency of Using Online Food Delivery Applications

Food Delivery Apps	Negative	Tie	Positive	Mean	Median	ZValue [#]	p-value
Swiggy	11	25	29	3.42	3.00	3.182	<0.001*
Zomato	33	13	19	2.65	3.00	-2.476	<0.013*
KFC	63	2	-	1.22	1.00	-7.469	<0.001*
Pizza Hut	48	13	4	1.68	2.00	-6.364	<0.001*

Source: Primary Data;
*One Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test; *Significant at 5 per cent level of significance*

Table 3 presents the problems faced by customers while using online food delivery applications. Since all the p-values are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected for all variables, indicating that the respondents’ opinions significantly differ from the hypothesized median value.

Among the service-related problems, “High delivery charges” recorded the highest mean score (2.31) with a median value of 2.00, indicating that it is the most serious problem experienced by customers. A considerable number of respondents reported it as a severe problem. “Late deliveries” also emerged as a notable issue with a mean score of 1.69 and a median value of 2.00. On the other hand, problems such as “Refund delays”, “Payment failures”, and “Wrong orders” reported comparatively lower mean scores, indicating that most respondents did not perceive them as major problems.

Concerning product-related issues, all variables recorded mean scores below 1.50, showing that the majority of

respondents experienced only a low level of product-related problems. Among them, “Difficulty finding specific dishes or cuisines” obtained the highest mean score (1.46), followed by “Lack of detailed item descriptions or images” (1.43). Problems such as “Stale or spoiled food”, “Spillage and leakage”, and “Unhygienic practice” recorded comparatively lower mean scores, indicating that these issues were not widely experienced by the respondents.

Overall, the analysis reveals that customers face more concern regarding service-related issues, particularly high delivery charges and late deliveries, than product-related issues while using online food delivery applications.

Problems Experienced by Customers Based on Age Group

The present analysis examines the relationship between age group and the level of problems experienced by customers while using online food delivery services. The study employs the Kruskal–Wallis H test to compare the extent of

Table 3
Issues Encountered Using Online Food Delivery Apps

Variables	No problem	Mild problem	Severe problem	Mean	Median	Z Value [#]	p-value
1. Service Related							
Late deliveries	28	29	8	1.69	2.00	-3.333	<0.001*
Wrong orders	54	9	2	1.20	1.00	-6.949	<0.001*
Customization errors	46	17	2	1.32	1.00	-6.351	<0.001*
High delivery charges	12	21	32	2.31	2.00	3.015	<0.003*
Login problems	44	20	1	1.34	1.00	-6.410	<0.001*
Payment failures	56	8	1	1.15	1.00	-7.285	<0.001*
Lack of customer service	40	21	4	1.45	1.00	-5.427	<0.001*
Ineffective grievance redressal Mechanism	43	20	2	1.37	1.00	-6.112	<0.001*
Refund delays	63	2	-	1.03	1.00	-7.937	<0.001*
Limited payment options	44	17	4	1.38	1.00	-5.774	<0.001*
Misleading offers	44	14	7	1.43	1.00	-5.181	<0.001*
Difficulty in tracking	37	24	4	1.49	1.00	-5.154	<0.001*
2. Product Related							
Stale or Spoiled Food	52	13	-	1.20	1.00	-7.211	<0.001*
Spillage and Leakage	49	13	3	1.29	1.00	-6.379	<0.001*
Non-availability of all food items	46	16	3	1.34	1.00	-6.143	<0.001*
Unhygienic practice	49	13	3	1.29	1.00	-6.379	<0.001*
Difficulty finding specific dishes or cuisines	43	14	8	1.46	1.00	-4.901	<0.001*
Lack of detailed item descriptions or images	41	20	4	1.43	1.00	-5.516	<0.001*

Source: Primary Data;
[#]One Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test; *Significant at 5 percent level of significance

Table 4
Age Group-wise Analysis of Issues Encountered by Customers

Variable	Mean Rank			Kruskal WallisH	df	p-value
	Below 25 (N=21)	25-45 (N=33)	Above 45 (N=11)			
1. Service Related						
Late deliveries	31.60	35.18	29.14	1.223	2	.543
Wrong orders	33.50	32.61	33.23	.072	2	.965
Customization errors	35.95	32.38	29.23	1.570	2	.456
High delivery charges	35.79	31.55	32.05	.808	2	.668
Login problems	28.60	35.42	34.14	2.606	2	.272
Payment failures	30.02	35.42	34.41	3.180	2	.204
Lack of customer service	37.07	32.73	26.05	3.367	2	.186
Ineffective grievance redressal mechanism	34.00	34.12	27.73	1.512	2	.470
Refund delays	33.55	32.98	32.00	.541	2	.763
Limited payment options	39.48	30.53	28.05	5.629	2	.060
Misleading offers	33.17	32.56	34.00	.074	2	.964
Difficulty in tracking	34.07	33.29	30.09	.438	2	.803
2. Product Related						
Stale or Spoiled Food	32.69	34.38	29.45	1.183	2	.554
Spillage and Leaks	31.67	34.64	30.64	.929	2	.629
Non-availability of all items	39.17	29.42	31.95	5.466	2	.065
Unhygienic practice	31.67	35.58	27.82	2.738	2	.254
Difficulty finding specific dishes or cuisines	31.19	33.70	34.36	.421	2	.810
Lack of detailed item descriptions or images	34.64	31.53	34.27	.566	2	.753

Source: Primary Data;

*#KruskalWallisH; *Significant at 5 percent level of significance.*

problems encountered by customers across different age groups. The following hypotheses are formulated for the study:

H0: There is no significant difference in the level of problems experienced by customers belonging to different age groups.

H1: There is a significant difference in the level of problems experienced by customers belonging to different age groups.

The results indicate that the p-values for all variables are greater than 0.05, showing that there is no statistically significant difference in the level of issues experienced by customers belonging to different age groups. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. Although slight variations in mean ranks are observed among the age groups, these differences are not significant. Customers below 25 years reported relatively greater concerns regarding limited payment options and non-availability of all items, whereas customers in the age group of 25–45 years showed comparatively higher mean ranks for login problems, payment failures, and unhygienic practices. However, these variations do not indicate any significant association between age group and the problems encountered in online food delivery services.

Findings of the Study

The majority of online food delivery application customers (51 per cent) belong to the age group of 25–45 years, indicating that middle-aged individuals constitute the major customer segment. Further, 32 per cent of the customers are below 25 years and 17 per cent are above 45 years,

showing that customers belong to diverse age groups.

- The customer base of online food delivery applications shows a balanced gender distribution, with 49 per cent male customers and 51 per cent female customers, indicating equal acceptance and usage among both genders.
- The findings reveal that online food delivery services are most popular among employed professionals.
- Swiggy is the most frequently used online food delivery application among the respondents, as it recorded the highest mean score (3.42). In contrast, Zomato, KFC, and Pizza Hut were used less frequently, indicating that respondents prefer Swiggy over other applications.
- Among the service-related problems, high delivery charges emerged as the most serious issue faced by customers, followed by late deliveries.
- Refund delays, payment failures, and wrong orders were reported as comparatively less serious problems by the respondents.
- Concerning product-related issues, respondents experienced only a low level of problems, as all variables recorded mean scores below 1.50.
- Difficulty in finding specific dishes or cuisines and lack of detailed item descriptions or images were the major product-related concerns reported by the respondents.

- Issues such as stale or spoiled food, spillage and leakage, and unhygienic practices were not widely experienced by the customers.
- Overall, customers faced greater concern regarding service-related issues than product-related issues while using online food delivery applications
- It was found that there is no significant difference in the issues encountered by customers across different age groups while using online food delivery services.

Suggestions

- Online food delivery apps should introduce reasonable and transparent delivery charges to reduce customer dissatisfaction and improve affordability.
- Companies should strengthen their delivery network and improve coordination with delivery partners to minimize delays in food delivery.
- The apps should provide faster refund processing and secure payment systems to avoid inconvenience caused by refund delays and payment failures.
- Restaurants and delivery partners should ensure greater accuracy in order processing to reduce the occurrence of wrong orders.
- Online food delivery platforms should improve the search feature by enabling customers to easily find specific dishes, cuisines, and restaurants.

- Detailed product descriptions, quality images, and ingredient information should be provided for food items to help customers make better purchasing decisions.
- Although product-related issues were reported at a low level, regular quality checks should be conducted to maintain food hygiene, freshness, and proper packaging standards.
- Since service-related issues are more prominent than product-related issues, companies should focus more on improving delivery efficiency and customer support services.
- As customers across different age groups experience similar problems, online food delivery apps should adopt customer service strategies that address the needs of all users equally.

Conclusion

The study concludes that online food delivery applications are widely accepted among customers of different age groups and genders, with employed professionals forming the major user group and Swiggy emerging as the most preferred platform. Customers face more service-related issues than product-related issues, particularly high delivery charges and delayed deliveries, while food quality and packaging standards are generally satisfactory. The findings also show that customer problems do not vary significantly across age groups. The study suggests that online food delivery companies should improve service

efficiency, delivery systems, refund processes, customer support, and order tracking features to enhance customer

satisfaction and ensure the long-term sustainability of online food delivery platforms.

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