Food Delivery Apps in India: A Glimpse into Adoption Patterns, Influences & Usage Trends Among College Students

Prof. Alpana Vaidya[1], Ameya Patil[2], and Ajay Vaidya[3]
[1,2] *Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune*
[3]*University of Akron, Ohio, USA*

***Abstract*—Ordering food through delivery apps has become a common practice among college students, offering them convenience and a variety of food options to suit their hectic schedules and changing lifestyles. The present study examines the adoption patterns, trends, and influences of food delivery applications among 943 college students, between the ages of 18-21 years. Percentage analysis was used to evaluate overall trends while Chi square analysis and binary logistic regression were used to find the association between living arrangement and frequency of food ordering. Results showed that living arrangement was associated with food ordering frequency wherein those living alone were nearly 4 times more likely to order food multiple times a week or daily, as compared to those living with parents. There was an overall increase in usage of food delivery apps over the past year, with the increase being prominent amongst those living alone. It was also seen that most respondents usually ordered food during dinner time. Majority spent ₹200-500 per order and usually ordered 2 items. Fast food and Indian cuisine were the most ordered type of food. Social media content was also seen to have an influence on cravings.**

***Index Terms*—Food Delivery Apps, Online Food Ordering, Preferences, Living Arrangements**

I. INTRODUCTION:

Food delivery apps have revolutionized the dining landscape in the last few years. Ordering in has become the new norm suitable for any occasion weather it is satisfying one's own cravings, having a no cooking day or hosting family/corporate dinners. Although some of the biggest fast-food chains already had their own delivery apps, the emergence of third-party food delivery apps like Zomato & Swiggy allowed users to gain access to numerous restaurants and cuisines through a single app. This key feature along with the advent of internet penetration, smartphones, changing lifestyle and preferences led to an expansion in the industry (Singh & Puri, 2024). Today, India's online food delivery market is expected to touch US$54.87 billion and reach a market volume of US$ 90.43 billion by 2029 with a CAGR of 13.3% between 2025 and 2029 (Statista, 2024). Furthermore, many cloud kitchens like Oven Story, Rebel Foods & Biryani by Kilo, to name a few, have emerged as popular and profitable business models for entrepreneurs owing to their low operational costs, availability of diverse menus and ease of control over order and supply (Choudhary,2019).

Selvan et al. (2021) argues that traditional dining out habits are now shifting towards an "eating in" culture, predominantly among Indian metropolitan youth aged between 15-34 years which is mainly driven by congested cities where even short commutes are time-prohibitive, hectic schedules or work pressure and less time for leisure. This trend is also seen to grow among the smaller cities highlighting the significant change in consumer habits. College students particularly those between 18-21 years, are often considered to be in a transitional phase, trying to balance academics, social activities, and possibly even part-time jobs. This is also when many tend to leave their home for the very first time in pursuit of their academic or career goals. As a result of this, they are often tasked with making independent choices about their future as well as their daily lives including purchase decisions and food choices. In this context, studying the way college students' approach and use food delivery applications can provide insights into their consumption behaviors, preferences, and the factors influencing their choices, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of

how this demographic interacts with food delivery services

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study based in Madurai, researchers (Babu & Arthy,2019) found that the website design was the most important factor influencing one's decision to use a particular online food delivery application, followed by security of data. The key aspects that made a website design preferable included visually appealing aesthetics, responsiveness, wide display of menus and user friendliness.

Malik et al. (2024) used the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model to showcase how external stimuli and internal stimuli can drive customer satisfaction. The findings showed that online reviews, deals, cravings, and convenience all positively influence customer inspiration and satisfaction, while electronic word of mouth had no direct impact.

In a study on the U.S youth, researchers (Buettner, et.al, 2023) found that the use of food delivery apps was associated with several sociodemographic factors. For instance, it was seen that in comparison to white participants, participants who identified as non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic/Latinx used food delivery apps more frequently. Similarly, those individuals who lived with someone else, had higher perceived subjective social status, were food insecure, were financially responsible and were a full-time student were all significantly associated with greater food delivery app use frequency.

A study based in Chennai (Iyengar&Venkatesh,2024) showed that Swiggy was the most popularly used app followed by Zomato. Swiggy gained traction for its emphasis on safe and quick delivery, capturing 60% of respondent preference in this aspect. Zomato, on the other hand, excelled in competitive pricing, attracting 40% of users.

A study based in Pune (Iyer,2019) studied the impact of demographic factors on the usage of food delivery apps. It was seen that age, gender and marital status were significantly associated with usage of apps wherein 20 -25-year-olds, males and unmarried individuals were found to have the highest usage as compared to individuals older than 25, females and married individuals respectively.

Nedumaran & Madhuritha (2023) showed that a vast majority of online food delivery app consumers were youngsters ranging from 21 to 30 years of age. Furthermore, visual appeal ranked as the highest factor in terms of customer attitude towards an app followed by price comparison features while ordering food.

Researchers Titus et, al (2023) reveal that having a variety of eateries to choose from can help boost consumer happiness and app usage. Similarly, the design and user interface of a food delivery app can significantly influence consumer behavior, attracting new users and also encouraging frequent app usage. However, the quality of food packaging doesn't significantly affect overall customer satisfaction, suggesting that apps focusing on user experience, variety of options, and quick delivery may be some of the more crucial aspects in driving customer loyalty.

Khan & Maqbool (2024) surveyed 514 Indian customers to understand the factors influencing customer satisfaction with online food delivery services. They highlighted that presence of factors such as delivery customer services, food delivery agent behavior, and online payment security played a major role in increasing customer satisfaction as well as the intention to order.

Capito & Pergelova (2023) studied the consumption of food delivery apps from a psychological perspective. It was seen that consumers tend to use 4 groups of licensing effects to license or justify their food delivery app usage. These 4 reasons include: food on time, food for social mood, food fatigue, and escapism. It depends on the extent to which a consumer engages in self-regulation, awareness, and conscious management of their relationship with food whether these licensing effects can have either a positive or negative impact on the well-being of an individual.

In view of the above research citated, the present study aims to contribute to the body of literature by focusing on the way college going students view, approach and use such apps, with a particular emphasis on the influence of their living arrangements and other factors that may influence ordering behavior.

III. METHOD

A. Data Collection & Tools

Data for the present study was collected online. A link to the online survey was sent to potential participants via text message or email. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers and consisted of over 30

items, following either a dichotomous, multiple-response, or Likert-type response pattern. Additionally, a few open-ended questions were also included to gather better insights. Ethical considerations played a crucial role in carrying out the study. Convenient sampling involving the snow ball sampling technique was used to reach a large pool of respondents. Prior to the commencement of the survey, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the type of questions to be expected and the voluntary nature of their participation. All participants were assured that the information they provided would be used for research purposes only and that they could opt out of the study, if they wished to at any time. Only those participants who gave informed consent were redirected to the survey and were considered for the study. Additionally, only participants who used food delivery apps were considered for the study. This was done to ensure the sample comprised individuals with firsthand experience using the apps, which allows for a better understanding of user behavior, adoption patterns, and a more accurate reflection of the findings. The original sample pool consisted of 1,057 respondents. After data cleaning, 114 responses were excluded due to incompleteness/blank responses resulting in a final sample of 943 respondents.

B. Sample

A total of 943 college going students were considered for the study including 59% females and 41% males. Participants ranged from 18 to 21 years of age, with the mean age being 20 years (*S. D*=0.9). This age range was selected as individuals from this age group are usually undergraduate college going students who are generally more tech savvy and active users of food delivery apps. This is also considered the age of transition where individuals are not only transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood, but may also move away from their families in pursuit of their career or education and have autonomy over purchasing decisions. Participants were asked about their current living arrangements where it was noted that there was nearly an equal representation of individuals living with their parents and those living alone (either in a flat/ PG or hostel). Participants were seen to have a differing range of the pocket money they received, wherein majority claimed to receive over ₹3000 every month. The distribution of democratic details of participants have been illustrated in Table.1.

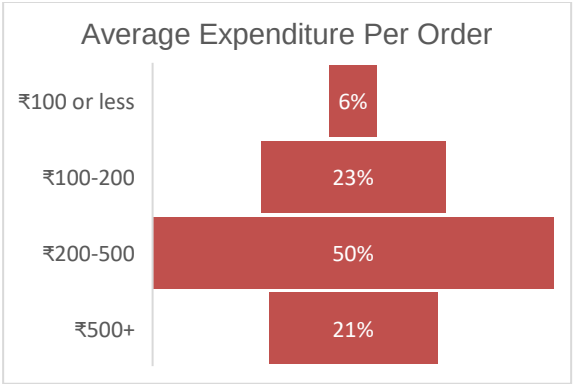
Table.1 Demographic Details of Participants

Statistical Analysis & Interpretation

Variable	Category	Percentage
Age (in years)	18	10%
	19	22%
	20	38%
	21	30%
GenGender	Female	59%
	Male	41%
Livi Living with parents Arra	Living with Parents	49%
	Living Alone	51%
PocPocket money (Monthly) Mo (Monthly)	₹500 or less	10%
	₹500 - ₹1000	9%
	₹1000 - ₹2000	12%
	₹2000 - ₹3000	23%
	₹3000 or more	46%

Food ordering expenditure patterns revealed that 50% of respondents spend ₹200-500 per order, while 23% spend ₹100-200. A substantial portion, 21%, reported to exceed ₹500 per order, while a minority, 6%, claimed to spend up to ₹100 per order as seen in Fig.1.

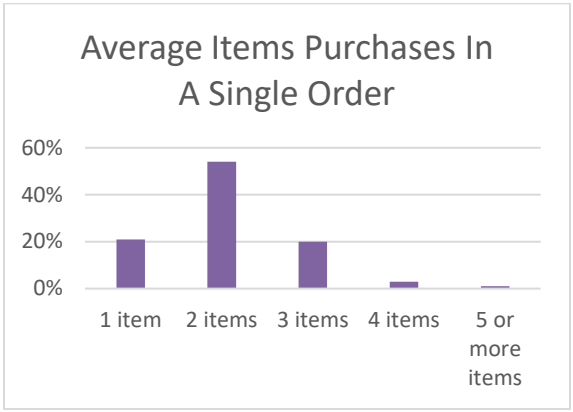
Fig.1 Average Expenditure Per Order



As seen in Fig.2 most respondents, 54%, reported ordering two items in a single transaction. 21% of

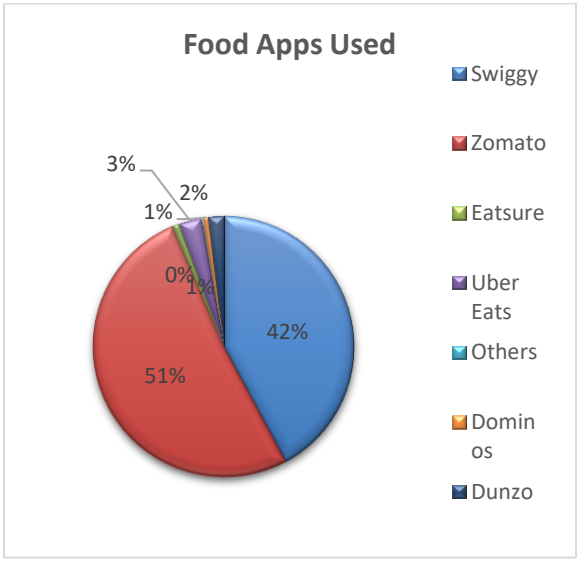
participants claimed to order just one item, followed by 20% who order three items per order. A small proportion of respondents claimed to order up to four items (3%) and five or more items (1%) per order.

Fig.2 Average Items Purchases in A Single Order



A variety of food applications were used as seen in Fig.3, with 51% of respondents claiming to use 2 or more apps for ordering food. Zomato (51%) and Swiggy (42%) were popular preferences. Other notable apps used although to a lesser extent included, Uber Eats (3%), Dunzo (2%) Eatsure (1%) and Dominos App (1%).

Fig.3 Food Apps Used



Findings illustrated in **Fig.4** show that the majority (60%) usually placed orders during dinner time,followed by late night (20%) and lunch time (20%). It was also seen that while some respondents typically placed orders on weekends (38%) or weekdays (10%), more than half of the respondents (53%) claimed that their ordering is not tied to a specific day of the week.

Fig.4 Usual Time For Ordering Food

The participants in the study were asked about their preferred types of food/cuisine. The results Fig.5 showed that Fast Food was the most popular category, closely followed by Indian cuisine, highlighting the dominance of fast food and Indian cuisine, with significant interest in Chinese and Italian cuisines as well.

Fig.5 Type of Food Usually Ordered

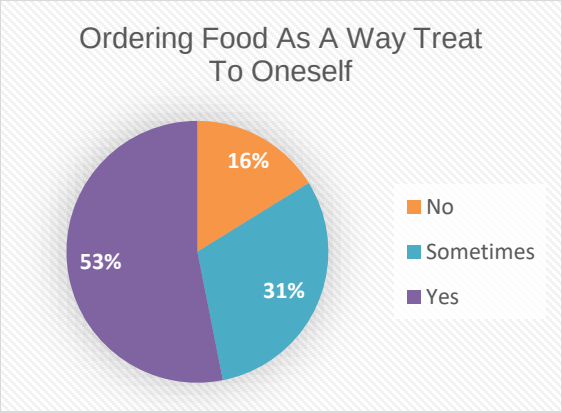
When ordering from a new restaurant or trying out a new dish/cuisine, it was seen that recommendations from others as well as the availability of good discounts played a crucial role, followed by customer reviews and social media posts or reels as seen in Fig.6.

Fig.6 Factors Considered When Trying a New Restaurant

It was seen that 53% of respondents perceive ordering food as a way to treat themselves, with 30%, stating that they sometimes consider it to be a treat for oneself

thereby indicating that ordering food is generally seen as a form of self-reward for a large portion of individuals as seen in Fig.7.

Fig. 7 Ordering Food as A Way Treat to Oneself



The data showed Fig.8 that that most respondents (52%) spend 10-20 minutes exploring options, followed by 27% taking less than 10 minutes. 16% take 20-30 minutes, while 5% spend over 30 minutes browsing as seen in Fig.8. It was also seen that a large proportion of individuals, 76% of individuals, reported feeling overwhelmed by the vast majority of food options to choose from.

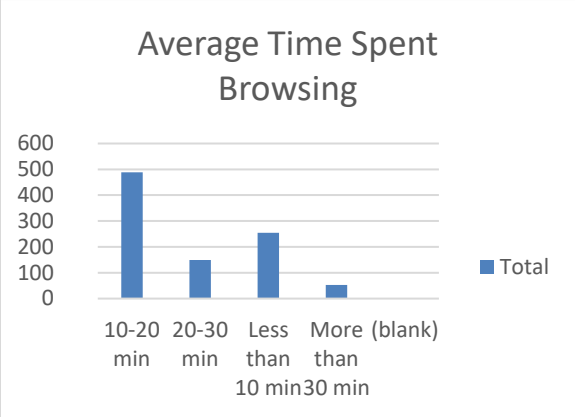
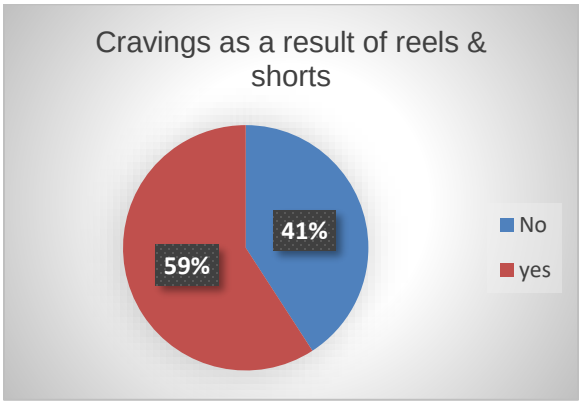


Fig .8 Average Time Spent Browsing

When asked whether they are more likely to order healthier food options using food delivery apps compared to dining out, 57% of respondents indicated "No", suggesting that food delivery apps do not influence their choice towards healthier options more than dining at restaurants.

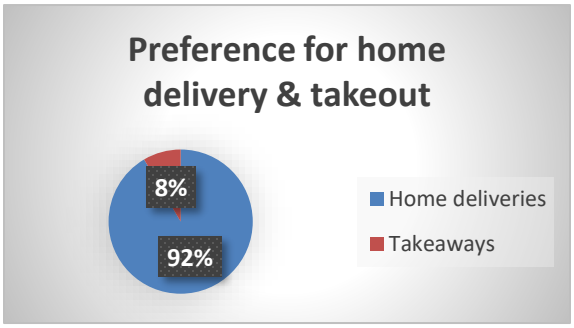
77% of respondents stated that the presence of visuals of food items on food apps significantly impacted their food ordering decisions. Similarly, 59% of respondents claimed that watching short-form social media content, such as Instagram reels and YouTube shorts influenced their cravings for food as seen in Fig.9, showcasing that visual and engaging content, like food-related videos, have a significant impact on one's desire to eat.

Fig.9 Cravings as a result of reels & shorts



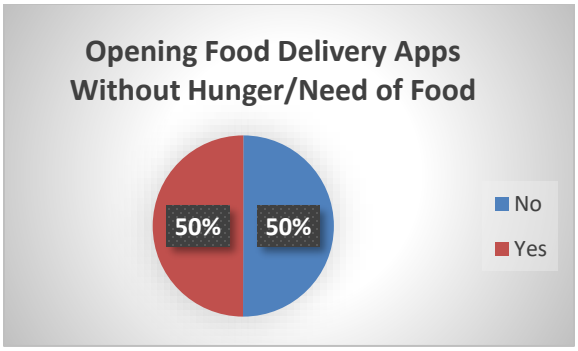
It was seen that over 92% of respondents preferred to have the convenience and comfort of having food delivered directly to their homes rather than picking it up themselves. Furthermore, 85% preferred ordering online to avoid the hassle of commuting or waiting at crowded restaurants as seen in Fig.10.

Fig.10 Preference for Home Delivery & Takeout



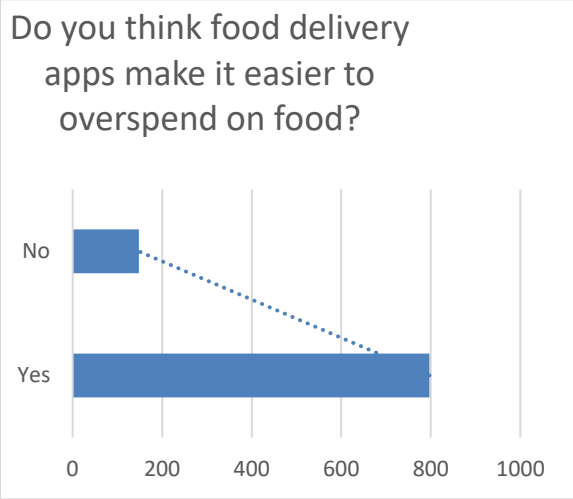
There was a 50-50 split observed when participants were asked if they open and browse their food delivery apps even when not hungry or in need of food, with 50% responding yes and 50% responding no.

Fig.11 Browsing Apps Without Hunger/Need



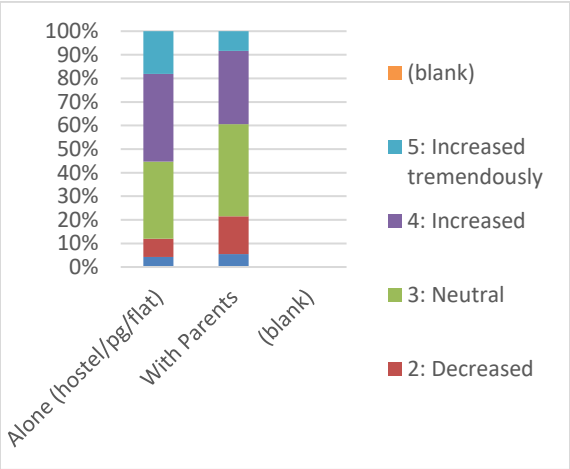
There was a strong perception that using these apps can lead to an increased spending on food with 80% of respondents finding it quite easy to overspend on food as indicated in Fig.12.

Fig.12 Overspending as A Result of Food App Usage



Participants were asked to rate the extent to which their usage of food delivery apps has changed over the past 1 year on a scale of 1(Decreased Tremendously) to 5 (Increased Tremendously). As indicated in Fig.13, among students living alone, 55% reported either an increase or tremendous increase in usage, with 33% of students reporting a neutral change, while 12% reported a decrease or tremendous decrease. For students living with parents, 39% reported an increase or tremendous increase, with 39 %, reporting a neutral change, while 22% of indicated a decrease or tremendous decrease in their usage. As an overall trend, across both groups, nearly 48% reported an increased usage.

Fig.13 Increase in Usage over the Past Year



To understand the overall association between living arrangement and frequent ordering of food (inclusive of ordering daily, multiple times a week and once a week) versus ordering infrequently (inclusive of ordering a few times a month & rarely) a Chi Square test of independence was conducted. The results as illustrated in Table. 2, showed a statistically significant association between the variables, χ^2 (1) = 89.272, $p < .001$, suggesting that living arrangement is associated with the frequency of food ordering. Specifically, it was seen that individuals who live alone were more likely to order food more frequently than those living with parents.

Table. 2. Chi-Square Tests for Living Arrangement & Ordering Frequency

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	89.272[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	88.041	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	90.875	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	89.177	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	943				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 211.30.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Subsequently, separate Chi-Square tests were also performed to examine the relationship between living situation and different levels of frequent ordering.

Daily Ordering: As indicated in Table.3, the chi-square test revealed that living arrangement is significantly associated with daily food ordering, χ^2 (1) = 25.71, $p < 0.001$.

Table. 3. Chi-Square Tests for Living Arrangement & Daily Ordering

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.711[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	24.117	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	29.749	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	25.684	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	943				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.87.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Ordering a Multiple Times a Week: As indicated in Table. 4**,** the chi-square test revealed that living situation is significantly associated with ordering food multiple times a week, χ^2 (1) = 56.735, p < .001

Table. 4. Chi-Square Tests for Living Arrangement & Ordering Multiple Times A Week

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.735[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	55.594	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	58.646	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	56.675	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	943				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 110.49.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Ordering Once a Week: As indicated in Table. 5, the chi-square test revealed living arrangement is not significantly associated with ordering food once a week, χ^2 (1) = 1.400, p = .237.

Table. 5. Chi-Square Tests for Living Arrangement & Ordering Once A Week

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.400[a]	1	.237		
Continuity Correction[b]	1.205	1	.272		
Likelihood Ratio	1.403	1	.236		
Fisher's Exact Test				.267	.136
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.399	1	.237		
N of Valid Cases	943				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 80.93.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

To further quantify the association between the variables, a binary logistic regression was conducted to examine the effect of living arrangement (LivingSit) on the likelihood of ordering food multiple times a week and daily. As indicated in Table.6, individuals who lived alone were approximately 4.3 times more likely to order food at a higher frequently (multiple times a week or daily) compared to those who lived with parents (Exp(B) = 4.36, 95% CI [3.17, 5.99]). The coefficient for living alone was 1.4, and the Wald test showed that this effect was statistically significant, χ^2 (1) = 82.2, p < .001.

Table 6. Variables in the Equation (Binary Logistic Regression)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1[a]	LivingSit	1.473	.162	82.247	1	.000	4.363	3.173	5.998
	Constant	-1.797	.134	180.019	1	.000	.166		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: LivingSit.

IV. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the present study was to understand the way in which college students view, approach, and use food delivery apps in India. The younger generations of today are known to be tech-savvy and rely heavily on digital platforms and social media to form opinions and make decisions (Silva et. al,2024; Suryaningrum et.al,2023). This trend is evident in the growing popularity of food delivery apps, where a large body of literature (Khan & Maqbool,2024; Martha et.al,2023; Buettner, et.al, 2023; Ariffin et.al, 2021) indicates that the young adults are the dominant users of online food delivery apps. This demographic's high engagement with technology and online platforms, preference for convenience and being highly accustomed to on-demand services make them prominent users of online food delivery apps. Subsequently, college students have tight and hectic schedules with demanding academic workloads and extracurricular activities, with some even juggling part time jobs. In such scenarios, cooking a home-cooked meal may be difficult, especially for those students who live alone. As a result, many students may lean into ordering food out of necessity (Chakraborty, 2019). This trend is also reflected in the findings of the present study. It was seen that with over half of the sample living alone, living arrangement was significant associated with frequency of ordering food. While there was an overall increase in usage over the past year, the increase was more prominent amongst those living alone. Furthermore, the overall Chi-Square test showcased strong evidence of an association between living arrangement and frequent food ordering but the separate tests show that this influence was more prominent among those with a more higher ordering frequency such as for those ordering either daily or multiple times a week. Similarly, a binary logistic regression revealed that that those living alone were nearly 4 times more likely to order food multiple times a week or daily, as compared to those living with parents. There is some evidence to indicate that those living alone are more likely to order food from food outlets as compared to those living in families (Antwi, et.al, 2023; Poon & Tung, 2024). It can be argued that this may be because those living with parents may have less reliance on food apps due to availability of home-cooked meals. However, this is not to say that living alone drastically increases order frequency but rather there may be numerous other factors that have an influence on this association.

Findings showed that the peak time for ordering in was for dinner which is in line with previous studies (Ipsos,2020; Statista,2024). It is also seen that for more than half of the sample, the day of the week does not matter when it comes to ordering food. This suggests that many may see ordering food as a convenience that is not tied to specific days, reflecting a move convivence driven behavior where the usage may be more spontaneous and driven by immediate needs (whether it is having a hectic day or simply having cravings for a particular dish). It was also seen that the majority were spending ₹200-500 per order, and typically choosing two items, showing a preference for affordable yet convenient food options. Similarly fast food and Indian cuisine were the most popular choices highlighting a strong preference for comfort food and familiar meals.

In today's times, social media serves as an important channel for the advertisement and marketing of numerous products and services. Food related content is growing in popularity where many food and beverage outlets and companies have taken to social media to market their products via influencer advertising (Veirman et.al,2017). Viewing food related content, especially fast food has been associated with increased feelings of hunger (Zeeni et.al,2024) and can also influence food choices and preferences (Nelson & Fleming, 2019). These findings align with the results of the present study, where it was observed that the presence of visuals and the consumption of short-form social media content can drive cravings and food decisions. Findings from the present study also showed that food delivery was viewed as a form of self-reward, with over half of respondents viewing it as a treat to oneself, indicating a trend where ordering food is linked to indulgence. This is in line with previous research by (Noorani et.al,2023) who argues that modern food consumption often caters to emotional and hedonic desires rather than solely nutritional needs with few even using it as a coping strategy for boredom. This can also help explain why some individuals engage with food delivery apps without necessarily being hungry or requiring food.

Our findings showed that Zomato and Swiggy continue to dominate the industry. It was seen that over

half of respondents were using 2 or more delivery apps. This trend illustrates the tendency to explore and evaluate options based on offers, deals, preferences, availability and variety. As indicated by (Siresha, et.al 2024) various food delivery apps cater to different meal types and circumstances, suggesting that different apps are appropriate for different types of meals. From a business perspective it also highlights the opportunity to tap into smaller delivery apps by offering targeted promotions, exclusive deals, or app specific offers. Coul

V. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study can provide valuable insights relating to consumer patterns and preferences for online food ordering. However, a few limitations need to be considered. Firstly, convenient sampling method was used which can bring forth the issue of bias. Similarly, the scope of the study is limited only to college students within the specific age group of 18 - 21 years which may not represent the broader population of users leading to issues with generalization of findings.

There is also a possibility that respondents who order food frequently may have been underrepresented in the present study. Future research can address this by ensuring there is no class imbalance, with a specific focus on individuals who are more regular or frequent users. Furthermore, while our study shows the association between living arrangement and order frequency, this is not to say that living alone by itself results in an increase of order frequency but rather there may be numerous other factors at play. These could be environmental/social/behavioral including the availability of time, financial resources, access to food, locality etc. Future research could consider the mediating and moderating factors involved in this association as well as look into other demographics as well as gender-specific preferences for a better and more comprehensive understanding.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Online food delivery apps have now become a necessity for many individuals. While they once were viewed as a means to order junk food, they have now become an alternative to home-cooked meals, a source of occasional treats, a means of satisfaction, and a relief from the demands of cooking, reflecting a shift in consumer habits and preferences. Insights from the present study reflect opportunities for food delivery companies to cater to college students by focusing on offering affordable, comfort-based meals with good deals or offers, ensuring they meet the evolving demands of this demographic.

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