

An Empirical Study of Trends in Home Food Delivery Markets of India and adjoining nations, during global pandemic of COVID-19

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Abstract

The eating habit of the world is changing dramatically. Under two decades ago, restaurant-quality meal delivery was still largely limited to fast foods such as pizza and Chinese cuisine. Nowadays, food delivery business has become a global market worth more than \$150 billion, having more than tripled since 2017. The restaurant owners are relying heavily on technology to strengthen online to offline food delivery, and thereby helping large number of consumers. Succeeding in the fast-growing food-delivery ecosystem will require understanding how overlapping economic forces affect a complex web of stakeholders.

The Covid-19 pandemic had created unprecedented challenges and uncertainties for everyone across the world. The health and wellbeing of people, their families and the communities was the priority during the difficult time. In response to the evolving situation every business organization ensured that they safeguard their people, maintain their ability to serve their customers, and protect the businesses for the long term.

The study is focused on observing the impact of Covid -19 pandemic on food delivery market in different economies and reporting the trends and the remedial measures, thereby adopted and implemented by key players in the food delivery market in prominent locations across the world.

Keywords: Food delivery market, Covid -19 pandemic, food-delivery ecosystem, trends, remedial measures.

Literature Review

Food delivery has been changing dramatically over recent years and we believe it will continue to evolve. In the early 2000s, food delivery started as a relatively simple marketplace business model (Food 1.0). In recent years, own delivery challengers expanded food platforms (Food 2.0), increasing the selection of restaurants and raising consumers' expectations for service. But that is only the beginning. There are several exciting growth Adjacencies, including cloud kitchens, private brands, groceries/convenience deliveries and restaurant software that could further expand the growth profile and improve the ability of leading food platforms to compete successfully (Food 3.0) (Naspers2020)

The business of delivering restaurant meals to the home is undergoing rapid change as new online platforms race to capture markets and customers across the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Although these new Internet platforms are attracting considerable investment and high valuations—already, five are valued at more than \$1 billion—little real knowledge about market dynamics, growth potential, or customer behavior exists.

Research from McKinsey, based on a six-month study covering 16 countries around the globe, provides insight into this fast-changing market.

Worldwide, the market for food delivery stands at €83 billion, or 1 percent of the total food market and 4 percent of food sold through restaurants and fast-food chains. It has already matured in most countries, with an overall annual growth rate estimated at just 3.5 percent for the next five years.

The traditional category has a 90 percent market share, and most of those orders—almost three-quarters—are still placed by phone.

Aggregators build on the traditional model for food delivery, offering access to multiple restaurants through a single online portal. By logging in to the site or the app, consumers can quickly compare menus, prices, and reviews from peers. The aggregators collect a fixed margin of the order, which is paid by the restaurant, and the restaurant handles the actual delivery.

A **new-delivery** players allow consumers to compare offerings and order meals from a group of restaurants through a single website or app. Crucially, the players in this category also provide the logistics for the restaurant. This allows them to open a new segment of the restaurant market to home delivery: higher-end restaurants that traditionally did not deliver.

We believe the addressable market for new delivery will reach more than **€20 billion by 2025**.

Customers drawn to the new online food-delivery platforms have a different set of needs and expectations from the traditional pizza customer. The study uncovered the following important traits:

1. New delivery platforms are efficient in retaining customers (80%).
2. The optimal wait time is no more than 60 minutes. (60%)
3. Orders from home=82%, Workplace=16%
4. 74 % of orders are placed on weekend-Fri, Sat, Sunday.

In Europe, online penetration rates run from 56 percent in Sweden to 43 percent in Austria, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East are at the beginning of the growth cycle.

Another study is done by Limetrax in 2018 on India and UAE. According to A report on the online food delivery industry, emerging trends, expert opinions and ideas for restaurants by Limetrax.

- 40% restaurant owners think third-party aggregators have complicated the delivery industry.
- 76% restaurant owners use SMS/emails to engage with customers
- 88% restaurants think that technology has improved their operational efficiency

According to Business Standard online article published in 2017. Online food-ordering sector grew at 15% q-o-q from Jan-Sep 2017

- Average daily orders grew to 400,000 in the three months to Sep 2017
- In-house deliveries accounted for 56% of all orders in the Sep quarter
- Delivery times dropped to 42 minutes in Q3 FY17 vs 47 minutes in Q4 FY16

India's online food ordering sector saw a strong growth rate in the number of daily orders, growing consistently at 15 per cent on a quarterly basis from January to September last year, according to a report from RedSeer Consulting.

The growth has resulted in the number of orders on a daily basis clocking an average of 400,000 during the September quarter. It has also meant players, including Swiggy, Zomato and Foodpanda, are investing in in-sourcing deliveries.

In the September quarter, self-deliveries grew to 56 per cent of the total number of orders done by the food-tech sector in India. In-house deliveries stood at 46 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2016.

Currently Zomato and Swiggy dominate the online food delivery market in India.

Food ordering platform Swiggy admitted its pan-India food delivery has recovered to around 80-85% of pre-Covid-19 order value.

According to the report, published by Google and Boston Consulting Group (BCG) on Tuesday, said that rapid digitisation and growth in both online buyer base and spending will help India's online food industry to achieve that mark - growing at a CAGR of 25-30 percent. The report revealed variety in cuisines was one of the top reasons for recurrent use of online food ordering apps; this was by 35 percent. Good discounts and convenience were the next two reasons.

India's food-tech industry that includes Zomato and Swiggy is expected to touch an 8-billion-dollar mark by 2022, as per a new report.

The Google-BCG report also suggested that consumers have common impediments that hinder adoption. 25 % of the respondents stated a lack of trust in the app as the main barrier to usage. Delivery charges (18 percent), food quality concerns (13 percent) and lack of customisation (10 percent) are other reasons why customers have, so far, not experimented with online food ordering.

The online food delivery business reached US\$ 107.4 billion worldwide in 2019 and is expected to reach US\$182.3 billion by 2024 (Statista,2020). China, US, and India are the three largest markets. Eleme, Meituan, Ubereats, Grubhub, Seamless, and Swiggy are some of the major global service providers in this sector and have seen sharp growth in recent years. Globally the Food Delivery sector is expected to grow at an annual growth rate of 11.4% during 2019–24 (IMARC, 2020).The Statista report says that Food Delivery Apps are beneficial to organizations and customers both as it facilitates easier, more efficient, and hassle-free online order management and offline delivery.

Methods

The study is exploratory in nature and has been conducted by extensive study of secondary data available in the form of Research Articles, Industry Reports, Organizational Reports, Journals and business news published by renowned media houses during and after the COVID-19 outbreak. The research study is focused on the period/ duration of the COVID -19 outbreaks in the first wave i.e 2020 to 2022 in various parts of the world, wherein Asia pacific regions' business and economy have a significant role in the world economy. The research finding reported are based on observation of common trends, measures, strategies and business practices adopted by various key players in the food delivery market and reported in the published form.

The COVID -19 outbreaks and its Impact

According to the World Health Organization, hitherto there are 118,209,329 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,623,409 deaths worldwide (WHO, 2021). Strict COVID norms like maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, and avoiding direct or indirect social contact have been imposed by governments to minimize the spread of the virus and contain the associated infections (Pan et al., 2020; Venkatesh and Edirappuli, 2020; Xie et al., 2020). Strict worldwide lockdown measures imposed during the initial months of the pandemic and continued mobility restrictions have severely affected the traditional restaurant and catering industry as consumers are not willing to dine in or use public services. The restaurant industry which was projected to reach US\$ 899 billion in 2020 in US (National Statistics, 2020) is estimated to have lost around US\$ 240 billion by the end of 2020 (Klein, 2020). According to an estimate, the year over year decline of seated diners' restaurants worldwide was a staggering 32.39% from February to September 2020 (Statistia, 2020). China and India have also faced similar losses where restaurant revenues have declined by 45% (Zhao and Bacao, 2020) and 35% (Singh, 2020) respectively. During COVID-19 pandemic, FDAs followed the contactless delivery process to ensure minimal exposure. The initiatives and services by organizations offered multiple benefits (e.g., Yadav et al., 2019) to customers by efficiently maintaining social distance and enriching delivery services and to catering enterprises by helping them survive the pandemic and reducing the spatio-temporal delay in order and consumption process (Zhao and Bacao, 2020). FDAs also started several new initiatives such as supplying essentials to consumers, offering COVID insurance to delivery partners, developing pandemic relief fund, and strict adherence to hygiene standards at restaurants for all steps including preparing, cooking, and packing of food (Goyal, 2020).

Business Model(s) in Food Delivery sector.

Customers put their demands on the website, approve and execute the orders from the restaurants. At the same point, when an order comes in, the system gives data to the couriers nearest to the pick-up spot. If new entrants opt for this business model, it will be very difficult for them to negotiate against restaurant and courier networks that are already developed and configured that charge a higher rate, 25–30 percent on average. Their key feature is providing a range of restaurants and price points that cannot be offered by software-only markets (Belanche et al., 2020). The integrated business model used when companies decide to build their own app from which customers can position orders and have them

fulfilled by packages hired by the organisation as quickly as possible. Each driver or carrier instantly receives data from the admin about prepared meals and order requests. Based on the order choice or on the place, a courier decides where to deliver first, first serving the customer nearest to the courier. This business model, however, needs some infrastructure investment and will decrease the distribution costs in the long term. That implies that the food delivery solution provides its users with a highly customised experience when properly designed and improves revenue (Cho et al., 2018).

Hence there exist 3 types of Food Delivery Business Model.

1. Order only Model, they act as a bridge between the users and the local restaurants through their online platform. They facilitate the users and restaurants to connect with each other to place and deliver orders. The main aim of such a food delivery business model is to let the restaurants reach out to the larger audience base. On the other hand, let customers easily order food from their favourite restaurant. Here, restaurant have its own delivery boy, hence delivery service is captive in nature.

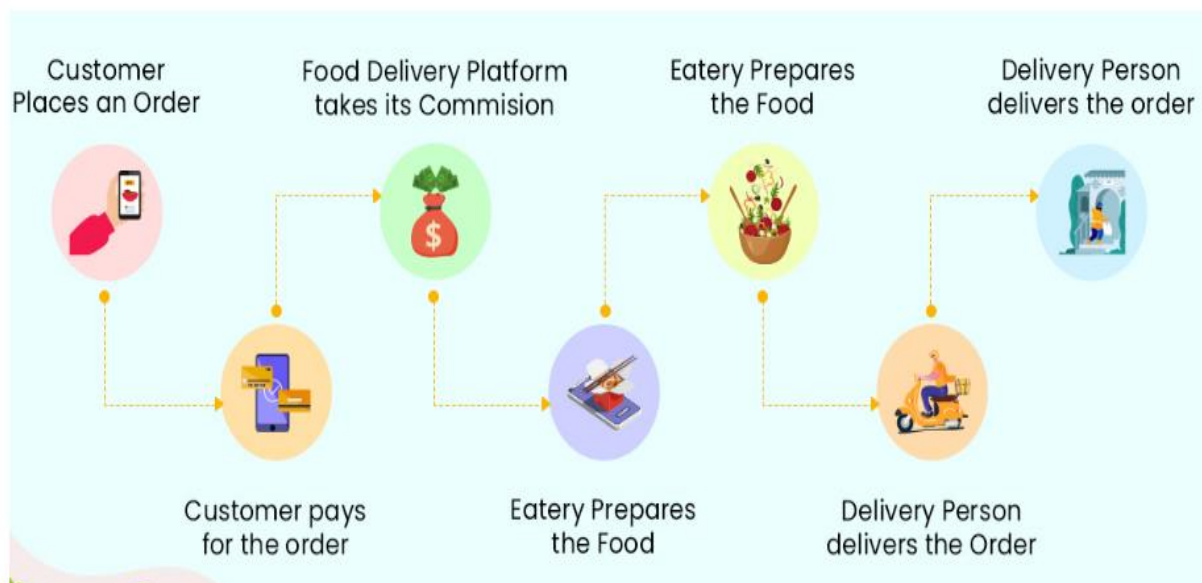


Figure 1 Order Only Model

2. Order and Delivery Model, it deals with restaurants, customers, and delivery. It is one of the most common marketplace solutions used by businesses today. Restaurants register with an online delivery platform, which is used by customers to order food from their favourite restaurant either through an app or website and they have an option to pay online or cash on delivery. The delivery boy nearest to the location gets a notification to accept the order and deliver it to the customer who has an option to add any kind of delivery instructions; delivery is applicable, depending on the distance of the delivery location from the restaurant or food

outlet. In this model restaurant, delivery boy and owner of the business model all three are separate working individuals. That is, the restaurant will get the order, the delivery boy will deliver it and the owner of a business model i.e website or application owner will get a commission.

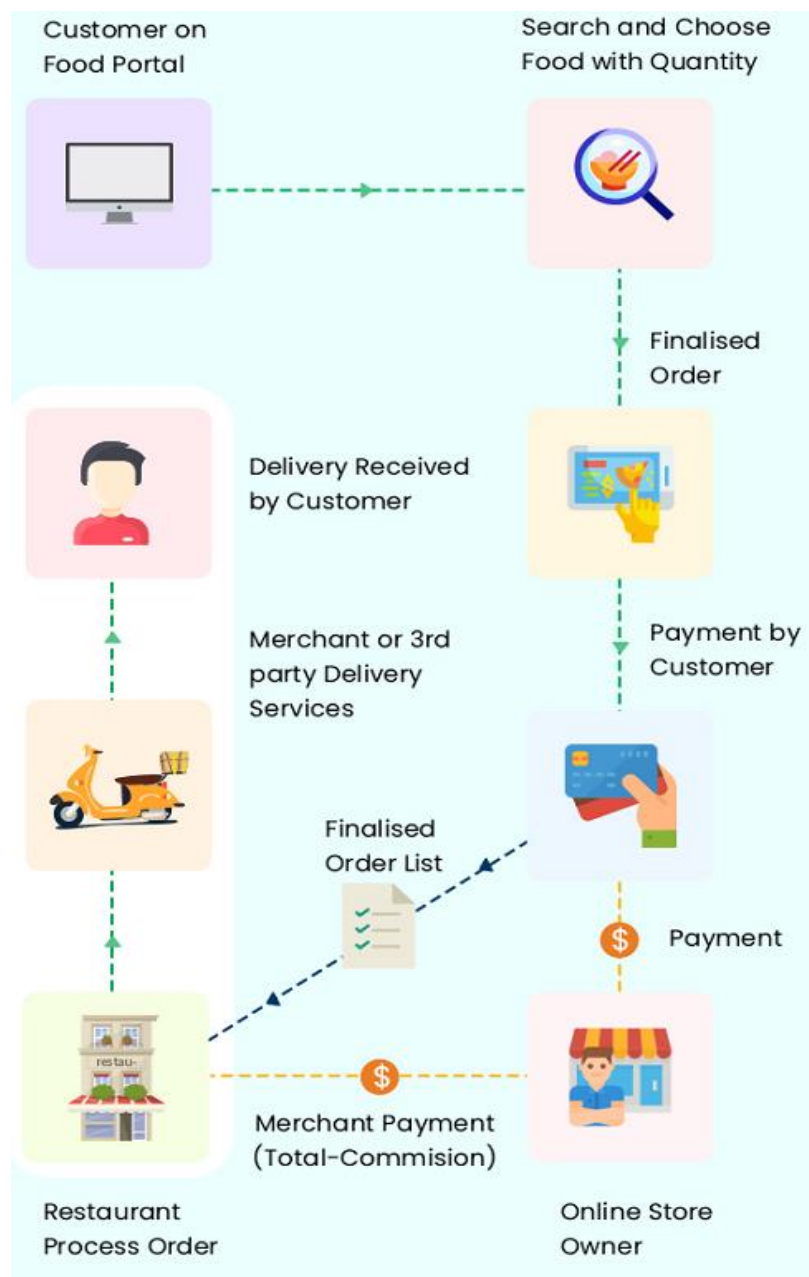


Figure 2 Order & Delivery Model

3. Fully Integrated Model, it is a complete meal delivery business plan to start your own venture. Everything comes under the owner, whether it is a restaurant or delivery boy. From cooking food to delivery everything is to be done by the website owner. (M. Panchal, 2020)

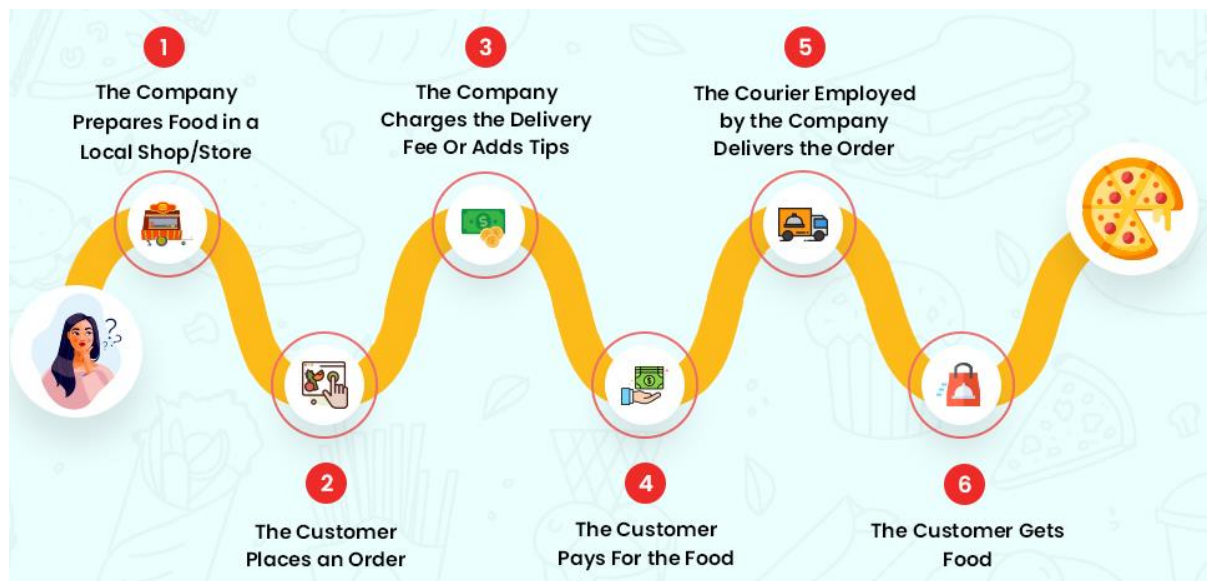


Figure 3 Fully Integrated Model

Key Players of Food Delivery service provider. As consumer expectations and regulations evolve over the coming years, and as emerging technologies continue to reshape the food delivery industry, there exist some key players in the whole food delivery system who play an important role; which includes restaurants, food-delivery platforms, drivers and customers.(K. Ahuja et al, 2021)

A. Restaurants and other Food Sellers, restaurants earn their profits against three basic costs: 1. Food (generally 28 to 32 percent of total costs), 2. Labor (another 28 to 32 percent), and 3. Occupancy- or real-estate related costs (22 to 29 percent). Looking at a unit economics view of a restaurant, the business should run between 78 to 93 percent of its capacity—allowing for a profit margin between 7 to 22 percent (franchise restaurants pay additional franchise fees to corporate). Delivery orders placed via online platforms act as an extra table for the restaurant, these are serviced by a driver or delivery boy instead of a waiter. Delivery orders aim to improve a restaurant’s revenues by optimum utilization of its kitchen at a profitable margin. Some restaurants raise their delivery menu prices to cover this cost, while others opt for price consistency, spreading the markup among all customers.

B. Delivery Service providers, they make their money through five key revenue streams: a) restaurant commission fees (platforms typically charge restaurants about 15 to 30 percent of the price of a meal), b) customer delivery fees (usually \$2 to \$5 per order, collected directly from the customer), c) customer service fees (surcharges of up to 15 percent, on top of delivery fees), d) in-app advertising (with platforms able to position brands and products

based on customer-preference data), and e) tips (which go directly to drivers but which effectively subsidize platforms' operating costs).

C. Delivery Boys or Drivers they must complete a certain number of deliveries per hour to make the economics favorable for them. In fact, time is one of the most expensive components of single-point delivery, with the physical handoff to the customer typically taking one to five minutes. As food delivery takes off in less densely populated locations, including suburban and rural areas, the service becomes more costly to both restaurant and driver.

D. Customers, they are paying a significant premium over the cost of their average order. Customers' total costs include delivery fees (\$2 to \$5 per trip), driver tips (usually around 10 to 20 percent) and platform service fees (which are often offset by discounts but generally come out to around \$3). Customers do not directly see the service commissions that restaurants pay platforms. Customers are paying a 40 percent premium on the cost of their actual meal, it is worth noting that restaurants themselves receive around only 55 percent of the total customer spend. (K. Ahuja et al, 2021)

Findings: Trends Observed in Food Delivery Market during Global Pandemic.

The effects of the Covid-19 virus on the food-delivery industry vary significantly by country, largely due to differences in governments' responses to the crisis. In Brazil, where food-delivery companies are deemed essential services, iFood exceeded its order target in March. In India, Swiggy struggled under a 21-day national lockdown. Although Swiggy had permission to do business at the national level, some municipalities enforced harsher restrictions at the local level and the general disruption to society created challenges for both supply, for example labour shortages as migrant workers return to their home villages, and demand, for example high-income consumers substituting in-home meals for delivery meals. But, in Middle East and North Africa region where government-imposed curfews it resulted depressed dinner sales (Naspers2020). Similar quotes were made by Swiggy in a newsarticle published in Economic Times. With offices resuming operations, it expect the working population to migrate back to the metros in the near future and reach full recovery, its pan-India food delivery recovered to around 80-85% of pre-Covid-19 order value after Unlock 1 which started around in June 2020. However, during the lockdown period, Swiggy had to let go of 1500 employees and scaled-down its multiple access kitchens. (Indian Tech Desk).

Early trends indicate both Zomato and Swiggy saw a drop in orders, even before the all-India lockdown came into effect on 25 March 2020. (The Indian Express). During the early phase of the pandemic, when a food delivery boy was tested positive for COVID-19, the trust in the safety standards of food delivery operators was questioned, and it triggered a further shift in consumer sentiment. According to Citi Research Report the trend in availability of online restaurants providing food delivery services during the Covid-19 pandemic across the world has been varying as depicted in Figure 4.

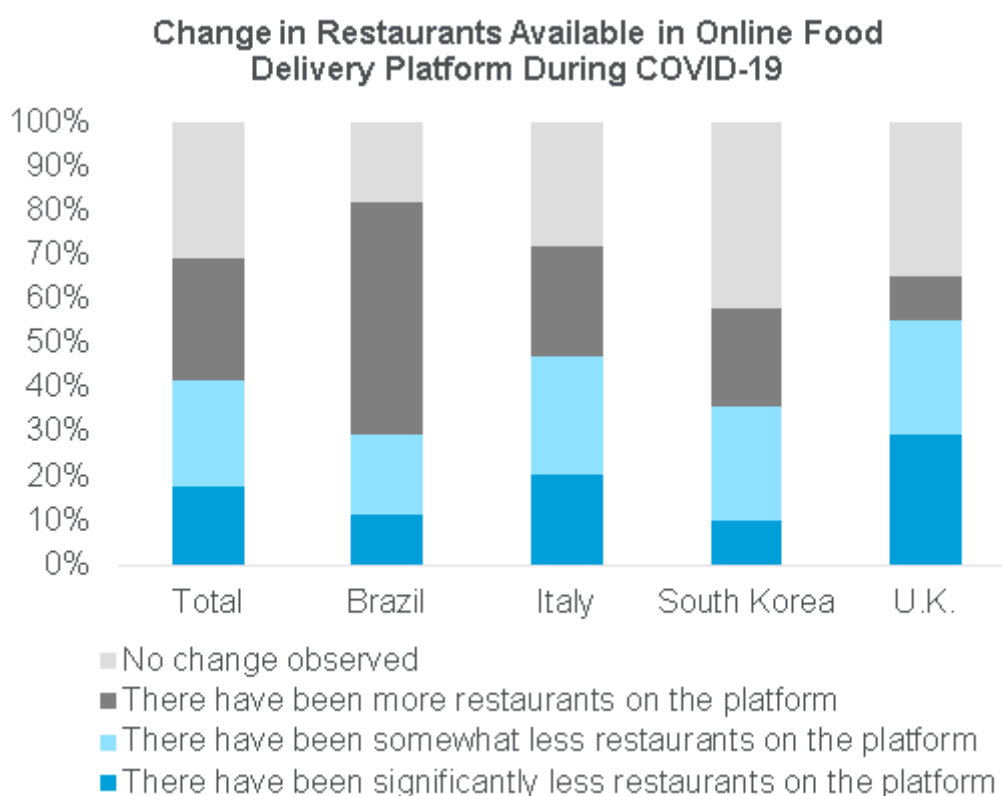


Figure 4. Availability of Restaurants during Covid -19 Lockdown

In April 2020 Nasper donated R1.5bn in emergency aid to the government's response to the Covid-19 crisis. This comprised R500m to the Solidarity Response Fund announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa, and R1bn of personal protective equipment and other medical supplies, which were sourced in China, in partnership with the Chinese government and Tencent, to support South Africa's health workers. Nasper also donated 1 billion rupees to the Indian Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund) created by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Donations were used to alleviate directly the suffering of those affected by the Covid-19 crisis and to aid the emergency

response. Swiggy, launched a campaign to donate meals to persons in need in India. The public were also invited to donate to this campaign. The campaign donated around 35000 meals per day, with a goal of distributing approximately 500000 meals per day in the short term. BYJU'S offered its learning platform for free in India, as per Naspers Annual Report 2020.

While delivery has helped many restaurants weather the COVID-19 pandemic, the added costs make the current model unsustainable for the long term. As depicted in Figure 5. (McKinsey 2021) As the COVID-19 pandemic began to pose an existential threat to restaurants, delivery became a saving grace. Many restaurants that delivered through online platforms were able to grow their delivery revenue throughout 2020. Even so, their overall profits generally declined, occasionally resulting in negative margins (Figure 5). This trend may have been accelerated by dining restrictions imposed during the pandemic, but the gap between delivery-fueled revenue spikes and profit declines was already an underlying issue.

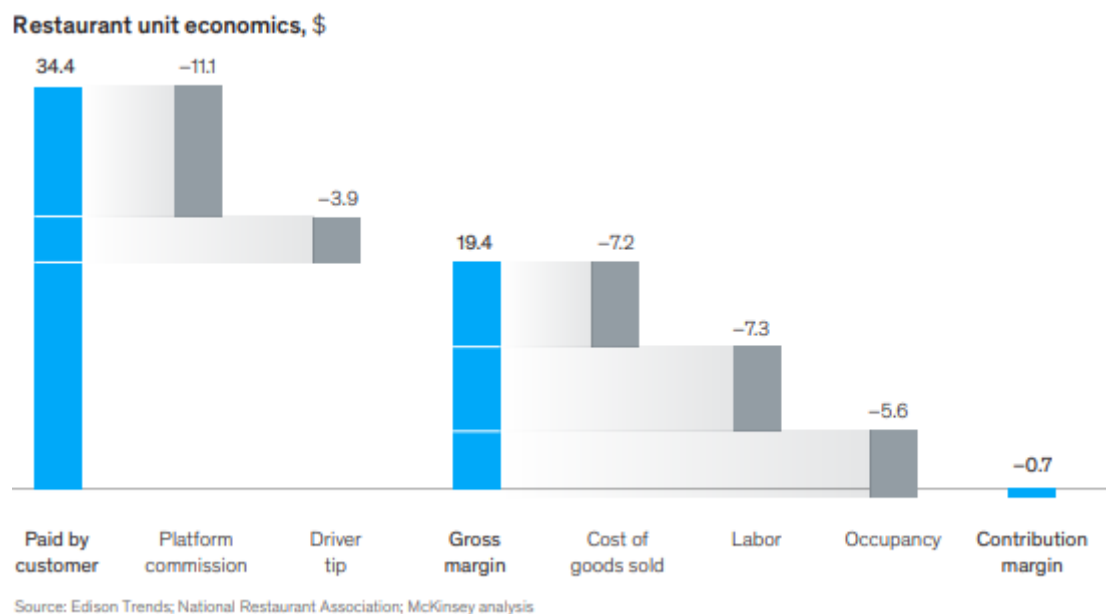


Figure 5, Impact on Restaurants Business Model

As reported by a consumer survey conducted by Statista on two top food delivery service providers in India i.e Swiggy and Zomato, users perceived food delivery services as safe and convenient way of ordering food and other essential items, as soon as the government allowed delivery of eatables during the lockdown (Figure 6).

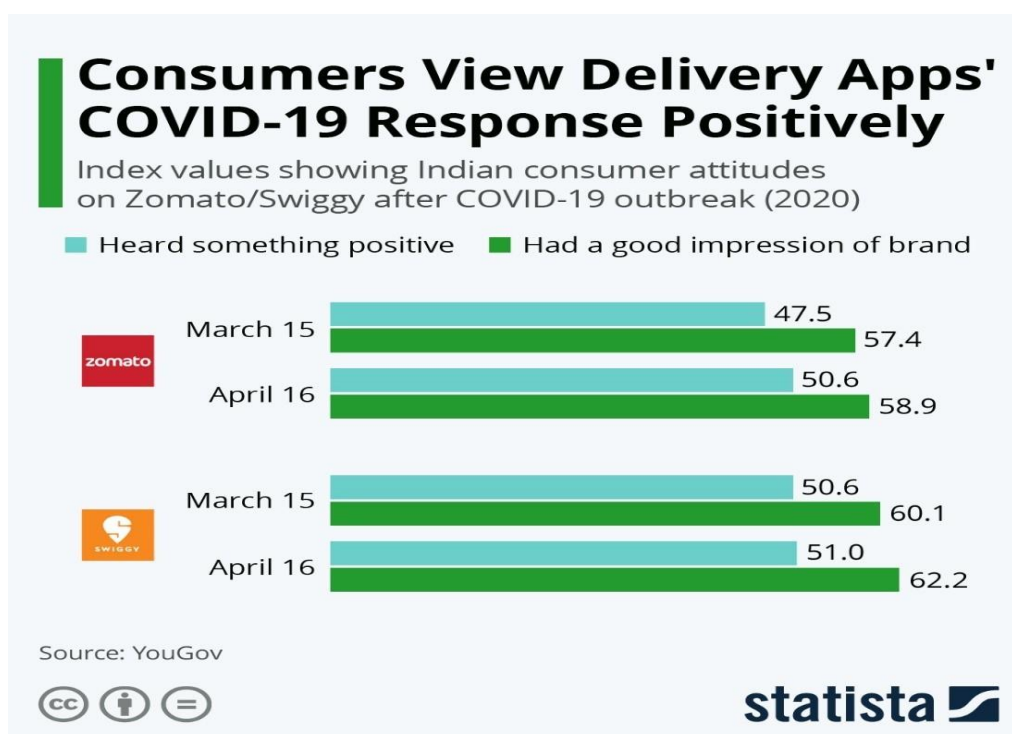
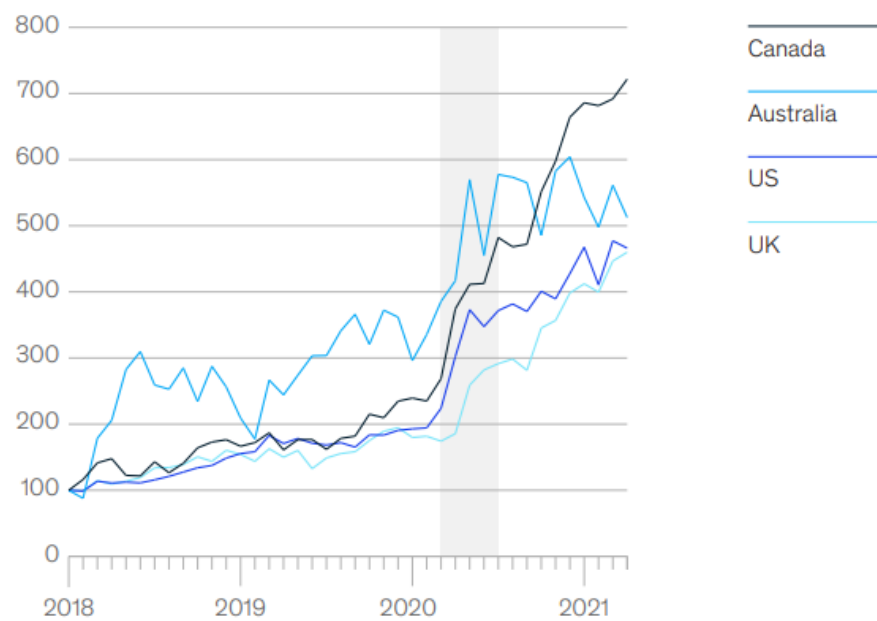


Figure 6, Positive response of Consumers in India towards FDAs

As reported by a consumer survey conducted by Statista on two top food delivery service providers in India i.e Swiggy and Zomato, users perceived food delivery services as safe and convenient way of ordering food and other essential items, as soon as the government of India allowed delivery of eatables during the lockdown (Figure 6). So, most of the food delivery service providers started gaining back their revenues after the permission from the local authorities and local administration.

Similarly in most matured food delivery markets worldwide, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, exponential growth continued in 2020 and early 2021 to the point where these markets are now four to seven times larger than they were in 2018. Delivery sales were increasing at roughly twice that pace (7 to 8 percent). While population growth was a factor, the bulk of the increase came at the expense of the grocery sector, with millennials and Gen Zers preferring the convenience of prepared meals (Figure 7). Since pandemic-related lockdowns started in March 2020, the growing food delivery business has spiked to new heights in the most mature markets. The trend toward convenience grew more during the pandemic. Between March and May 2020, when lockdowns in Europe and the United States were the most severe, the food-delivery market spiked. Significantly, it has maintained that trajectory, continuing to grow throughout 2020 and into 2021 (McKinsey 2021).

**Normalized
delivery-platform
sales growth, index**
(Jan 2018 = 100)



Source: Edison Trends

Figure 7, The growing food delivery business in most matured markets

Implications for Theory/ Theory Development

The study gives an insight into various business strategies which have proved to be successful in sustaining business for various operators engaged in restaurant food delivery services. These business strategies highlighted over here can constitute to development of theory for sustainable business strategies during abnormal business environment. As it is evident, from different business reports, that various the food delivery service providers were able to make profits by practicing the mentioned business strategies during the pandemic of COVID 19.

Implications for Readers

The readers will get an insight into the real business situation of food delivery market during the Global pandemic of covid-19 in various parts of the world. The readers will be able to understand the economic condition of some of the prominent nations which includes Asian countries like India, China, Sri Lanka and some other major contributors in the global economy like United States of America, Middle East and North Africa. The observations collected and communicated in this research article will help the readers to understand the common effective business strategies of key players in the food delivery market in these nations. The readers will also get insight into the business model of food delivery service provider and the economics of the food delivery business. The y will also get the information

related to the popular food delivery service providers in prominent Nations which have been discussed in the study.

Implications for Business and Management Practice

As per the trends observed during the COVID-19 crises, it is evident that the influence on food delivery market was very short lived, and the market regained its historical growth very quickly rather the lockdown situation and work from home models had a positive impact on some restaurant operators which showed higher profits in their annual reports.

However there exist certain challenges for the Food Delivery service providers in current economic scenarios, an attempt has been made to highlight some these challenges and discuss possible solutions for them.

Food Delivery service providers will face Geographic Competition; rival platforms will continue to fight each other for customers, restaurants, and drivers in each individual market, potentially leading to further consolidation over time. Hence, amalgamation, consolidation, mergers, takeovers and acquisition will be the possible solution before Food Delivery players to combat Geographic Competition and stay in the food delivery market. This battle will extend into new verticals beyond restaurants, as platforms widen the scope of services they provide.

Another challenge is commission rates; Food Delivery platforms make their money through five key revenue streams- restaurant commission fees, customer delivery, customer service fees, in-app advertising, and tips. During the pandemic, several local and state governments in the United States have imposed caps on these commissions, and some places are considering making these caps permanent (McKinsey 2021). If such initiatives taken and implemented by the local governments across various nations can ensure income for all the five key players in the Food delivery market and hence many businesses can sustain since there would be a control on the price competition.

Traditional restaurants that are also playing in the food delivery market are facing challenging completion from ‘Dark Kitchens’ or ‘Ghost Kitchens’, they are based on delivery only model. A dark kitchen is a restaurant that has no front of house for customers, these lower-overhead businesses can afford to pay the platforms’ higher commissions, they are often featured more prominently in the platforms’ apps. They may also be able to lower the service fees placed on customers. Increasingly, a greater share of delivery volume is likely to go their way at the expense of traditional restaurants, some of which may be forced to

consider whether they can afford to continue playing in the delivery space at all. At the same time, dark kitchens also present an opportunity for restaurants, which may choose to supplement their on-premises facilities with remote locations devoted to delivery exclusively (McKinsey 2021). Increasing total sales through delivery may look like a smart way to reduce fixed cost and increase profits, however it , a booming delivery business could mean that everyone has to work harder, right from the cooks to the managers to the maintenance staff and delivery boys or drivers. Food Delivery players will likely need to introduce new processes and systems to accommodate high volumes of delivery orders. So, they would have to increase its total sales significantly to stay at the same profit margin it enjoyed without delivery (Figure 5).

Menu Engineering is also recommended to Food Delivery players. Using the data generated through delivery platforms, restaurants can build custom menus for each consumer, increasing opportunistic sales, total order value, and conversion rates. End-to-end customization helps ensure that customer preferences, such as food allergies, are taken into account for every meal and the food recommendations would be more accurate.

Virtual brands are incremental offerings targeted at new meal occasions or cuisine types, developed to increase a restaurant's online presence and capture a different market segment. Virtual brands can help attract new customers, improve labor efficiency, and optimize order stacking for delivery platforms. Full-fledged virtual brand such as DumBir and Kitchens Centre have been running successfully in India, similarly MrBeast Burger, a virtual brand whose menu items are prepared in existing restaurant kitchens across the United States and in the United Kingdom. However, the evolving food-delivery ecosystem requires, and will likely reward, creativity.

Limitations

The research article has been designed on empirical research design and considering the limitations of resources of the researcher primary data could not be collected for the purpose of the study. The research article has been created citing incidents of impact of COVID 19 on the Food Delivery Market as reported by different research organizations, academicians, research scholars and journalists during the past couple of years only, however the global pandemic of COVID 19 is not over yet as WHO reports the threat of new variants of COVID 19 which can result in the fourth wave of pandemic, so there is a need to investigate the impact of pandemic during the complete tenure. The secondary data collected from various

sources as mentioned covers the period of pandemic during first and second wave only of global pandemic of COVID 19, so the change in trends of the Food Delivery Market during third and fourth wave of pandemic needs to be observed and analyzed. The regional data of Food Delivery by Market trends does not cover the whole world, only those incidents have been reported which were available, hence some regions remain unreported and uncovered in the study.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 crises, online Food Delivery services had a positive impact, that it allowed people to source food without leaving home (i.e., a positive impact for consumers), but using online Food Delivery during pandemic time did mean greater exposure for delivery boys. Under the lockdown conditions imposed in some country owing to the pandemic, many people's meal choices shifted from eating out or venturing out to buy groceries and cooking at home, to the online ordering of prepared food. For example, many essential workers started or increased their use of online Food Delivery services so that they could dedicate more time to their work. During pandemic time some online Food Delivery platforms reached out to their communities in various ways, they thanked medical staff and front line workers for their commitment to the cause by handing out free meals to them. Most of the MNCs involved or associated with Food Delivery services did supported the local communities by donating funds to local governments tackle the challenges of the pandemic and emerge stronger in the long term. Such initiative did have a positive impact and strengthen user faith.

Though a great number of restaurants have suffered and even closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in tech-enabled delivery has been a meaningful silver lining for many to sustain. Going forward, the food-delivery space is poised for further expansion and evolution as the "next normal" takes shape, the online Food Delivery service providers will need to adapt new strategies, think carefully about how to partner with other key players, and experiment with new ways of doing business. As the way people eat continues to evolve, new revenue pools are emerging. Tapping into them will require creativity and a willingness to overhaul operating models built for a different time. Delivery platforms will need to evolve how they leverage customer data to improve the user experience and find innovative ways to reduce the costs associated with food delivery services.

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