



COVID 19 and Online food services: Impact of pandemic on customer continued purchase intention

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Abstract

COVID-19 has given the retail industry beneficial prospects. Notably, because of the limits imposed by the epidemic, internet avenues have become increasingly important for firms that may rely less on traditional outlets. Catering companies and customers in Asia, including India, have embraced online food services (OFS) in large numbers. In particular, given the rare circumstance of the COVID-19 epidemic, OFS saves catering businesses while satisfying customers' psychological and technological demands. The dire need for OFS services in India during the COVID-19 epidemic is not well understood, though. A sample of 320 individuals, a virtual self-completion survey, and structural equation modelling were used. Findings show that continuing intention is highly influenced by perceptions of one's attitude, perceived hygiene, and perceived health. According to the study, the perceived risk of dining out encourages the adoption of OFS. Although using a representative population of young consumers (18–35 years old) ensures strong internal validity, insights cannot be generalised to other age groups. The study offers restaurants helpful insights on how to: (1) create and manage their own OFS technologies; and (2) choose the best third-party platforms.

Keywords: COVID pandemic, Online food services, Attitude, Continuance intention, Hygiene.

1. Introduction

The current pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus of influenza, or coronavirus, is one of the most infectious in recorded history. According to the World Health Organisation, COVID-19 is the cause of the pandemic. The term "pandemic" currently refers to an epidemic that has spread to many nations, continents, or the entire world and that affects a large number of people, yet it still mostly affects Asian countries. The COVID-19 crisis has significantly transformed consumer and retailer purchasing patterns, presenting challenging situations for a number of sectors (Belarmino et al., 2021). Consumers throughout the world are allegedly viewing goods and companies through a new lens, according to surveys conducted following the initial wave (Eger et al., 2021).

One of the retail segments most impacted by the pandemic is undoubtedly the catering sector. Notably, a number of months' worth of lockdown restrictions have resulted in restaurant closures (Kumar & Shah, 2021). At the same time, these businesses have seen a rise in demand due to their potential to support customers at home, allowing them to deliver their goods in a location that customers perceive as safer (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). In light of this, online meal delivery services have taken on a significant role, acting as the only point of contact between eateries and customers, especially during times of lockdown.

Online food delivery services (OFS) are described in the literature as simple, useful tools that allow clients to order meals online without having to physically visit the restaurant. They stand out because they combine the conventional food delivery concept—orders are placed over phone apps and delivered to the customer's doorstep—with the development of technological devices (Seghezzi & Mangiaracina, 2020).

Before the pandemic crisis, restaurants normally employ these facilities minimally, but as the epidemic spread, these establishments were compelled to use these technologies on a large scale in order to survive. Customers who had never used online food delivery services or had not felt the need to do so were attracted to these facilities as a result of the pandemic situation. Additionally, the Millennial generation and Generation Z are the most active clientele, and men and women embrace OFS in about equal numbers.

Overall, this information allows us to confirm that the pandemic has significantly altered consumer food eating habits by causing people to use OFS more frequently. People still choose these services even when COVID-19 regulations are eased because of this mindset and the associated feelings of anxiety and dread stemming from the perceived danger of infection during restaurant meals. In light of this, it follows that the adoption of OFS will not only be a result of the crisis but also a fashion will last for years. In this regard, research emphasises the significance of figuring out the primary causes of consumers' intentions to continue using OFS both during and after the epidemic (Kartono & Tjahjadi, 2021).

The study focuses on three aspects with regard to the antecedents. Since food conditions play a important role in a pandemic scenario, the first set of aspects focuses on the food safety sector (Shim et al., 2021). In this regard, perceived hygienic standards and perceived health. The second set of predictors, which are pandemic fear and perceived risk of dining out, are directly connected to the COVID 19 pandemic scenario. Indeed, due to the incorporating of OFS (Belarmino et al., 2021) and the fear of a pandemic, online shopping has developed, specifically leading to the shift of the food industry (Kazancoglu & Demir, 2021).

Overall, the study makes substantial contributions in this way. Theoretically, it adds to the lack of background studies on OFS in the COVID-19 environment (Belarmino et al., 2021). Second, the study adds to the body of work that has mostly focused up to this point on various sorts of emergency circumstances by analysing how consumers behave while using internet technologies during crises (Kumar & Shah, 2021). Thirdly, by concentrating on the catering industry, it adds to the body of work that examines how COVID-19 has affected the dynamics of the retail industry (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

The article makes two managerial-level attempts: (1) to look at how restaurants might benefit from OFS to provide value to their patrons; and (2) to determine the best gender-specific marketing and communication tactics.

The other portions of the research are organised as follows: Part 2 provides an overview of the literature, and part 3 gives the formulation of hypotheses. Part 4 demonstrates the approach, while Part 5 examines the empirical findings. The study is finally concluded in Part 6, which discusses the implications, constraints, and prospects for further research.

2. Literature evaluation

This part begins by going through the continuous intention paradigm and its primary factors, which have previously been examined in both general literature and material that is specific to the OFS business. The listing of the factors examined in this particular section (i.e., perceived health, perceived hygiene, fear of pandemic, perceived risk of dining out, and attitude), as well as the factors that led to their selection and conceptualization, are the main topics of the second part.

2.1 Continuation intention and its factors in the framework of the OFS

After initial acceptance, an individual's desire to using again or purchasing a certain service provider goods, or service is known as a continuation intention (Okazaki et al., 2020). It is noteworthy that research has concentrated on this aspects, particularly by examine its factors in specific industries like shared services (Kim & Kim, 2021), mobile and social media apps and services (Qing & Haiying, 2021), and online buying (Luo & Ye, 2019).

Some studies have investigated the antecedents of the continuing intention in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic by concentrating primarily on the OFS sector. In particular, previous studies identified the impact of perceived utility, enjoyment, trust, and customer attitude on the desire to continue using OFS. Troise et al. have investigated the antecedents of the continuing intention in the environment of the COVID-19 epidemic by concentrating primarily on the OFS sector. In particular, previous studies identified the influence of perceived utility, enjoyment, trust, and customer attitude on the desire to continue using OFS. Troise et al. (2021) also make predictions on how attitudes, perceived utility, perceived behaviour control, subjective norms, and trust in OFS affect people's intentions to use them. According to Hong et al. (2021), the most important element influencing a customer's propensity to utilise OFS during the pandemic is perceived utility.

The following factors will be examined in the current study: attitude, perceived hygiene, fear of the pandemic, the perceived risk of dining out, and perceived health.

To go into more depth, perceived health and perceived safety have been selected since they are two variables that are specifically relevant to the food safety subject, which plays a crucial role in a pandemic scenario (Shim et al., 2021). H may be conceptualised as "how consumers perceive the product in terms of being clean and safe," whereas health can be described as how the given items are helpful in improving consumers' health (Shim et al., 2021).

The 2nd set of variables (fear of pandemic and perceived risk of dining out) are particularly relevant to the pandemic crisis. The COVID-19 problem has produced several effects, particularly on a global scale. The development of phobias in individuals ranks as one of the most pervasive of them (Halan, 2021). The dread of COVID-19 is conceptualised by Jian et al. (2020) as a negative feeling made up of worry and despair that results from knowledge of the virus's possible detrimental effects. The perception of risk among customers is another factor that affects their actions and intentions (Rather, 2021). People are choosing OFS more

frequently because they offer services that "shift consumption to safer, more controlled environments, such as the home" (Gavilan et al., 2016). This is regarding the perceived risk of dining out.

The third category of factor is the user's attitude towards utilising OFS. According to Liaw (2002), "attitude" is the way a person feels about and feels for a certain thing, concept, product, or service. Since a person who has a favourable attitude towards a goods or service is more likelihood to keep using it, research focusing on the influence of attitude on reuse intention highlights how attitude is an important driver of continuance intention (Kartono & Tjahjadi, 2021).

3. Developing hypotheses

3.1 Perceived health and hygiene

Perceived health and perceived hygiene have a significant impact on health issues. In this regard, a few studies have examined the influence of food safety on consumers' choice-making. Shi et al. (2021) look into the beneficial effects of perceived health on customers' purchase intentions in services of coffee, while Medina-Molina & Pérez-González (2021) analyse the association among perceived health and reuse intention in the setting of nutrients labels. Accordingly, the following is the first hypothesis:

H1: Continuation intention of using OFS influenced by perceived health

Literature on hygiene highlights how, particularly during the pandemic, peoples have become more conscious of social distance and hygiene because they are more worried about the possibility of coming into contact with pathogenic food or infected delivery man. (Al Amin et al., 2020) provide empirical support for the favourable influence of food delivery hygiene on the intent to continue using mobile food delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these earlier findings, it was possible to infer that consumers' perceptions of the OFS's hygiene had a favourable influence on their decision to continue using it.

H2: Perceived hygiene influences continuation intentions.

3.2 Pandemic fear and the perceived risk of dining out while COVID-19 exists

The work that is currently available indicates that people have adopted new habits, behaviours, and intentions as a result of their fear of pandemic and their perception of the risk associated with dining out (Halan, 2021; Rather, 2021), including a tendency to prefer avoid social networks, more time spent at home, and an increase in the use of OFS. As a result, customers have increasingly accepted these services as the primary alternative to dining out (Belarmino et al., 2021). Using these presumptions as a foundation, as well as the reality that, typically, a customer's usage and experience with a goods or service might encourage them to do so again (Chen & Yang, 2021), it is reasonable to believe that consumers' intentions to continue using OFS will be positively impacted by their fear of COVID-19 and their perception of the risk associated with dining out during that period.

Thus:

H3. The intention to continue OFS is influenced by fear of pandemic.

H4. Perceived risk of dining out influences the desire to continue

3.3 Attitude towards adopting OFS

Research supports this association in the area of COVID-19 as well when it comes to the influence of attitudes towards utilising OFS on continuation intention (Zhu et al., 2022).

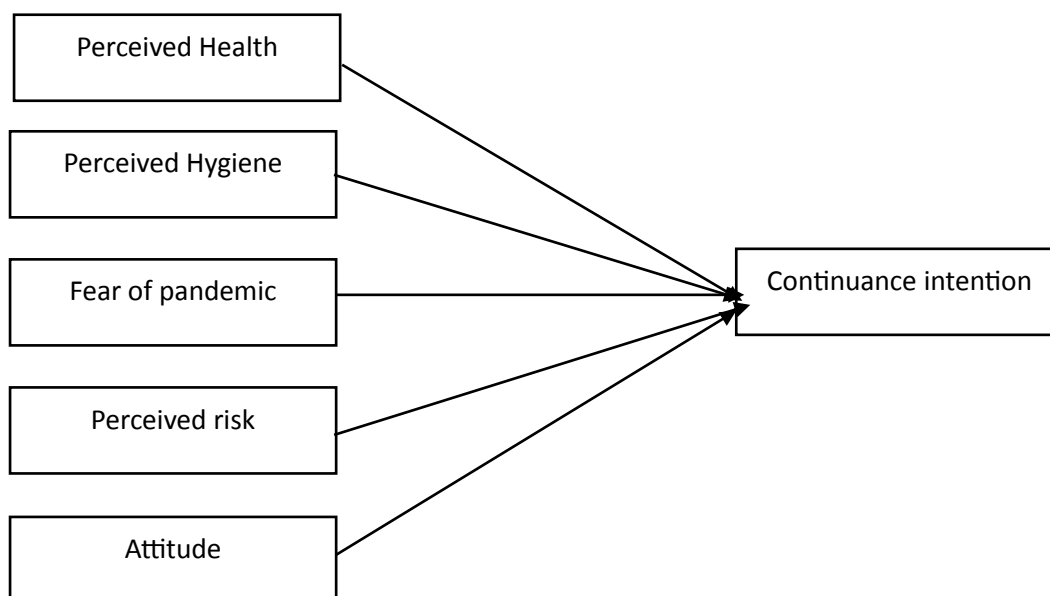
However, most of it has examined this relationship in other industries, like cruise services, web-based videoconferencing, online learning (Birkmeyer et al., n.d.), and mobile health apps. Based on the previous investigation, the following hypothesis has been made:

H5. An attitude towards adopting OFS encourages continued intention.

4. Methodology

A virtual self-completion survey was used to gather information from 360 respondents. This particular target has been chosen for the analysis based on the facts that (1) youth tend to purchase online more than other ages and (2) the most active OFS consumers are from youthful segments. Young people are those who are under the age of 35. Delhi-NCR was therefore picked since it is believed to be typical of those up to 35. In all, 320 correct replies remained after we excluded respondents with consistent responses and incomplete responses. Among the ages of 18 and 35, 46.7% of the respondents were male, and 53.3% were female. Almost 60% of respondents were aged 18 to 25, with the remainder aged 26 to 35. With 320 respondents overall, the sample has more respondents than the required 200, and the sample-to-item proportion of 12.4 exceeds the permitted ratio of 5:1. The study employed pre-existing scales that had received empirical validation in order to operationalize the notions. A Likert scale of seven points, with the first point being completely disagree and totally agree as the seventh, was used to ask survey participants to rate their degree of agreement with each of the issues.

Figure 1: Research Framework



5. Results

5.1 Validity and reliability of the measurement paradigm

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to determine whether the measurement model was adequate. The outcome of the CFA showed that the model fit was acceptable. Chi square (174) = 308.956, $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, and RMR = 0.04.

The measuring factors were indicative of the assessed variables, as shown by the acceptable (>0.50) standardised loadings estimates, indicating that the construct validity was sufficient

and Cronbach alpha values were above.07, as shown in Table 1. The range of the average extracted variance (AVE) across all constructs was 0.51 to 0.57, which is higher than the convergent validity requirement of 0.5. Regarding construct reliability, all constructs—ranging from 0.74 to 0.84—were above the standard limit advised to attain composite reliability (>0.60). To evaluate discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE and the correlations for each component were examined. All correlations, as shown in Table 3, were less than the square root for every AVE, demonstrating good discriminant validity.

Table 1: Factor loadings, Cronbach alpha, and sources

CONSTRUCTS	Factor Loading	Cronbach α	Sources
FE1 The coronavirus makes me nervous.	.715	.806	Jian et al. (2020)
FE2 I find it difficult to consider the coronavirus.	.737		
FE3 Because of the coronavirus, I fear for my life.	.745		
FE4 I feel uneasy or worried when I read or watch news reports on the coronavirus on social media.	.758	.905	(Shim et al., 2021)
PH1 The goods from brand X are nutritious.	.791		
PH2 My health is improved by brand X's goods.	.791		
PH3 Brand X sells goods that are concerned with health.	.787	.856	(Shim et al., 2021)
PH4 Products from brand X have less calories.	.788		
PHY1 OFS provides hygienic goods.	.755		
PHY2 OFS provides safe goods for consumption.	.782		
PHY3 OFS is safe to eat and healthy.	.705	.932	(Rather, 2021)
PR1 I like to stay away from dining out right now.	.797		
PR2 I like to stay away from dining out right now.	.764		
PR3 I would want to make any future outings outside of the house shorter at this time.	.801	.964	(Rather, 2021)
ATT1 Utilising delivery services is advantageous in the current scenario	.849		
ATT2 Utilising delivery services in the present circumstances is beneficial.	.786		
ATT3 Utilising delivery services is advantageous right now.	.779		
ATT4 The current circumstance makes using delivery services appealing.	.771	.921	(Li et al., 2019)
CI1 In the future, I'll commonly use brand X,	.732		
CI2 I'll regularly use brand X	.775		
CI3 I advise to others use brand X	.805		

Note: Brand x refers to preferred brand by user

Table 2 CR, AVE and Discriminant validity of CFA

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ATT	FR	PH	PHY	PR	CI
ATT	0.874	0.635	0.339	0.878	0.797					
FR	0.827	0.544	0.296	0.828	0.425	0.738				
PH	0.869	0.623	0.296	0.869	0.429	0.544	0.789			
PHY	0.792	0.560	0.339	0.795	0.582	0.493	0.334	0.748		
PR	0.830	0.620	0.262	0.831	0.456	0.346	0.512	0.474	0.788	
CI	0.814	0.594	0.248	0.818	0.498	0.447	0.446	0.494	0.387	0.771

Source: Survey

5.2 Testing of the research model

Overall, our model demonstrates that perceived health (t value 12.061, with a p less than 0.001), perceived hygiene (t value 4.11, p less than 0.001), and attitude (t value 8.020, p less than 0.001) all significantly influence continuance intention, whereas dread and risk of pandemic (t 2.36, 2.18, the p-value is 0.18, 0.28) are not noteworthy at the 0.05 level but are at the 0.10 level, confirming our supposition (Table 3).

Table 3: Research model testing outcomes

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
CI <---	FE	.121	.038	2.364	.018	
CI <---	PR	.064	.038	2.185	.028	
CI <---	PHY	.163	.040	4.110	***	
CI <---	PH	.403	.033	12.061	***	
CI <---	ATT	.264	.033	8.020	***	

5.3 A summary of the findings

Overall, the results showed that (1) perceived health, perceived hygiene, and attitude had a significant impact on continuing intention, and (2) fear of pandemic and perceived risk had a substantial impact at the 0.10 level.

More specifically, research on perceived health reveals how a product's perceived health, as supplied by an OFS, influences customers' propensity to keep using it. In this regard, the findings support previous studies that examined the important influence of perceived health on consumers' decision-making.

Additionally, results show that perceived hygiene has a favourable impact on continuation intention, emphasising how important a role these predictors play in determining consumers' intentions to re-usage of OFS during the COVID 19 crisis. This finding thus supports earlier research on the effects of hygiene on consumer behaviour, particularly in the delivery food industry (Shim et al., 2021).

The study demonstrates that COVID-19 fear and perceived risk have an impact on continuation intention, even if it is a small one. This supports the idea that the nervousness and dread brought on by the pandemic setting, together with perceptions of risk, are responsible for the continuation intention. People have used OFS more frequently as a result of their perceived risk of getting the infected while dining out (Rather, 2021), and in the future, they'll probably keep using these online services.

The findings support previous studies that have been done, particularly in the OFS industry (Yeo et al., 2016), that attitude plays a critical role in predicting customers' desire to stay with a brand. Using COVID-19 as a point of emphasis, the current study lends credence to the idea

that people's favourable attitudes regarding OFS might lead to a stronger intention to keep utilising them after as well as during the pandemic.

6. Implications, constraints, and potential future studies

6.1 Theoretically Implications

The study offers a variety of theoretical contributions. First, it fills a research gap on OFS in the context of pandemic, as the number of users and time spent on these apps have substantially increased (Belarmino et al., 2021). Accordingly, it has become essential to examine the primary aspects influencing customers to use OFS during the crisis.

Second, by examining the key factors influencing young customers' desire to continue using OFS in the environment of COVID-19, the article advances the examination of the attitudes and behaviours of a particular group (i.e., those among the ages of 18 and 35) by employing the usage of internet technology during a health emergency, supporting the findings of research that has mostly examined other types of situations of pandemic (Kumar & Shah, 2021).

Finally, it concentrates on the retail sector that has been substantially impacted by the pandemic, strengthening the research on the impact of pandemic on the dynamics of the retail industry (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). This made it possible to determine the key indicators that eateries should pay attention to in order to increase consumers' desire to make continued purchases using their online delivery services.

6.2 Implications for Management

Since the catering industry is one of the sectors most impacted by the COVID-19 situation, this article examines a highly intriguing retail concern. The study provides practical knowledge of potential techniques that restaurants, which primarily cater to consumers between the ages of 18 and 35, may use to encourage their young customers to make additional purchases from them by using online food services. The study helps restaurant managers understand how to (1) enhance their promotional strategies for their own OFS and (2) based on the existence or absence of the discovered predictors, select the best third-party systems. By identifying the primary factors driving young users to continue using OFS, the study helps identify how to continue to use OFS.

6.3 Constraints and future studies

The study has certain drawbacks. The sample is made up of Delhi-NCR respondents. In order to identify potential similarities and differences in the antecedents of the OFS's continuing intention in the COVID-19 setting, it would be important to study if the suggested framework could be generalised to other age groups and regional situations. More specifically, even though selecting a sample of young users (18–35 age) allowed for the identification of behaviours, attitudes, and purchase intentions specific to a particular group, providing important managerial implications, the results cannot be extrapolated to other age groups.

Finally, the adoption and continuation intentions of the OFS have been examined within the context of a specific crisis typology (i.e., the health and safety crisis). Therefore, it would be beneficial in future studies to use qualitative methods to assess consumers' intentions in various crisis circumstances, such as economic crises (Kumar & Shah, 2021).

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