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Online food buying behaviour among college going students

*¹Metta Siresha, ²Dr. V Vijaya Lakshmi and ³Dr. N Pavani

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Resource Management and Consumer Science. College of Community Science, PJTSAU, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

² Professor, Department of Resource Management and Consumer Science. College of Community Science, PJTSAU, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

³ Teaching Associate, Department of Resource Management and Consumer Science. College of Community Science, PJTSAU, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

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Corresponding Author: Metta Siresha

Abstract

The present study examined the awareness, usage trends and purchasing habits of 40 college students in Hyderabad, regarding online food delivery apps. Students from lower to middle-class families, mostly female, aged 17 to 19, made up the sample. The findings of the study Key findings include limited use of lesser-known applications, moderate usage of Uber Eats, Pizzahut, and Dominos Pizza, and high awareness and preference for Swiggy and Zomato (90%). The main sources of information were references from peers and word-of-mouth, while advertisements also had an impact. For different meal types throughout the day, Uber Eats was the preferred option, but Swiggy and Zomato were more popular for breakfast, lunch, snacks, and drinks. Most students used these apps frequently and typically spent less than Rs. 500/- per order. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with portion sizes, regular storage, sharing, or donation of leftovers, and low waste. Online payments were common. Among the issues raised were excessive packaging, delivery time, and food quality. The study focused the increasing dependence on food delivery apps among college students, driven by convenience and peer influence, while identifying areas for improvement to enhance customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Food delivery apps, meal preference, buying behaviour, consumer satisfaction, online platforms

Introduction

The rapid change in the advancement of mobile technology has led to the integration of mobile applications across all fields. As a result, the food business is utilizing this technology to order food online and communicate with a large audience. The food sector has undergone a complete change to online ordering. Online ordering and delivery is the process of placing an order for food online and having it delivered to the customer at the designated location [4]. Food delivery apps and online food ordering systems are mainly designed for the people to meet the current needs of the consumers in the busy lives. This kind of food delivery is becoming more and more popular particularly in the younger generation using different mobile applications that are available in the market [6].

Due to the rise in single-person homes and smartphone penetration rates, the market for food delivery mobile applications (FDMA) [2]. India possesses a varied food culture, which is being promoted through apps like Zomato, Swiggy, UberEats, Dunzo, Zepto etc. These online food delivery apps allow the users to order food from different eat outs whether at home or at work. Customers exhibit strong curiosity in all the innovations which makes the younger generation to follow the trend and discover new experiences with maximum ease and transparency,

anticipating the same level of service as they would from physically visiting any establishment [7]. The main aim of the study was to explore the awareness on online food delivery apps and understand the food buying behaviour and to assess the expenditure pattern among college going students.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted during the year 2024, by adopting an exploratory research design. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. College going students from Hyderabad, Telangana were selected for the study with a sample size of 40 college going students under the age group of 17 to 19 years. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect the data through google forms from the college students. The survey included the questions to assess respondents' awareness on online food delivery apps, knowledge, meal preference, mode of payment and problems. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the collected data.

Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study include age, gender, education, monthly family income, religion, and stay of the students. The respondents

were categorized into two age groups: 17-18 years and 18-19 years, 87.5% falls into 18-19 years. In case of gender, females represented 82.5%. All respondents were pursuing degree. Monthly family income varied, with majority of respondents fall in this category Rs. 12,444/- or less, 37.5% earning between Rs. 12,445/- and Rs. 37,354/-, and only 2.5% earning between Rs. 37,325/- and Rs. 62,272/-. Additionally, 12.5% of respondents had a family income exceeding Rs. 62,272/-, suggesting mostly lower to middle-income background. Regarding religion, 67.5% of respondents were Hindu, 25% Christian, and 7.5% Muslim. Most respondents (80%) resided in hostels, while 20% lived at home, revealing a lifestyle that influences the food consumption pattern. The results are explained under the following heads:

1.1 Awareness of Food delivery apps

The study revealed significant insights into the usage patterns of food delivery apps among college students in Hyderabad in Figure 1. Swiggy and Zomato emerged as the dominant applications that were used by 90% of respondents using these platforms. This indicates a high level of awareness and preference for these two apps. Following closely behind are moderate usage apps like Uber Eats, Pizzahut, and Dominos Pizza, which accounts 60 to 70% of students. However, there is a decline in adoption rates for lesser-known apps such as Food Mingo, Bydbyt, Eahara Food Delivery, and Doordash, with usage percentages under 15%. The least used apps, including Postmates, B2B Categories, Chownow, and Box Food, garner had less than 5% usage among the surveyed students.

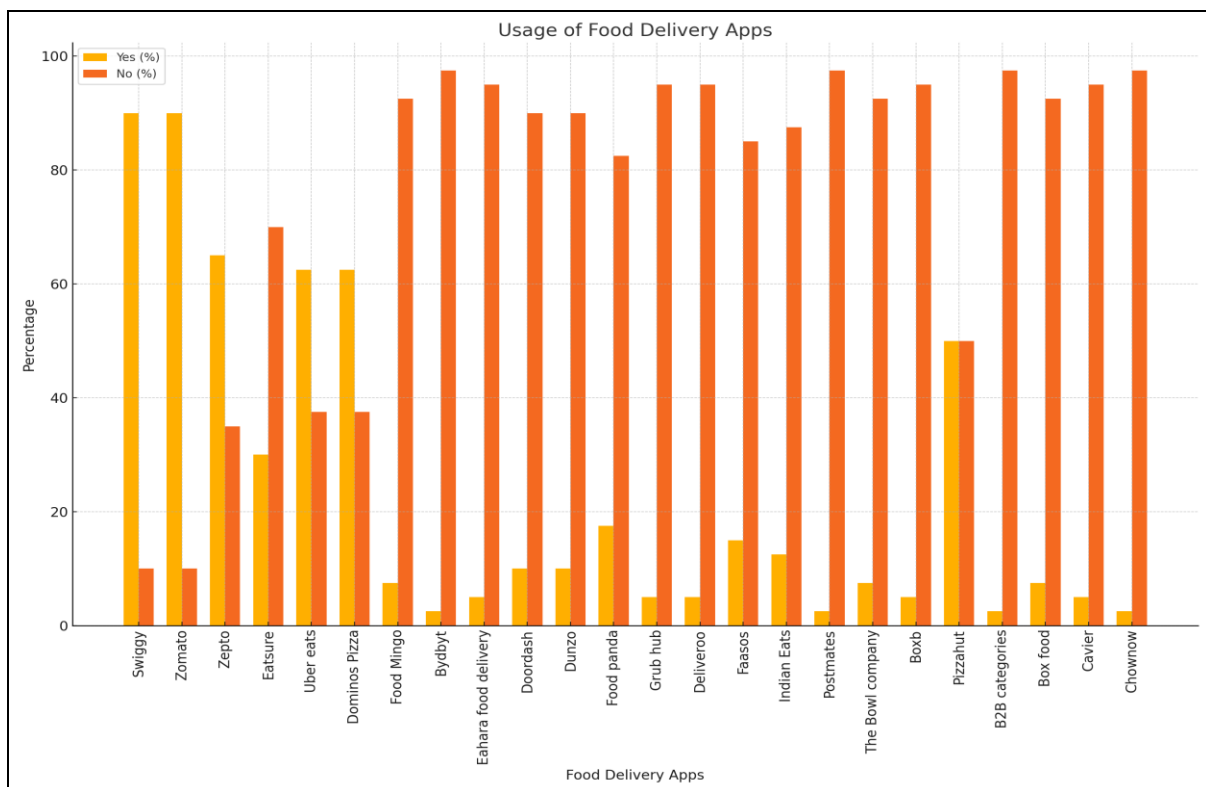


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents according to Awareness of the Food delivery app

This data emphasizes the intense competition in Hyderabad's food delivery app market and the strong brand presence and marketing efforts of Swiggy and Zomato among college-going consumers also stated that these are the popular apps [3].

1.2 Source of Information about food delivery app

The information reveals that participants used to learn about different online food delivery apps. A significant number of respondents in the study mentioned discovering popular food delivery apps such as Swiggy, Zomato, Uber Eats, and Eahara Food Delivery through word-of-mouth suggestions. This highlights the strong influence of personal conversations and referrals from others in influencing users' choices. Friends also played a crucial role, with a considerable portion of participants mentioning that they learned about these apps from their social group. Colleagues were also mentioned, although to a lesser extent, particularly stating Eatsure, Uber Eats, Dominos Pizza, and Eahara Food Delivery. Remarkably while advertisements were mentioned by a few respondents, they seemed to have a significant impact on the discovery of Eatsure, Uber Eats, Dominos Pizza, and Pizzahut among users. This diverse mix of apps tells that consumers become aware of different food delivery platforms in figure 2.

College students appear to use meal delivery apps primarily through word-of-mouth and recommendations from peers. App awareness is also influenced by advertisements, particularly on bigger platforms like Uber Eats and Dominos Pizza. According to this study, peer pressure and personal recommendations appear to be major factors in this demographic's app usage that have the most effects on college students' app uptake and usage, and young adults use these apps frequently¹.

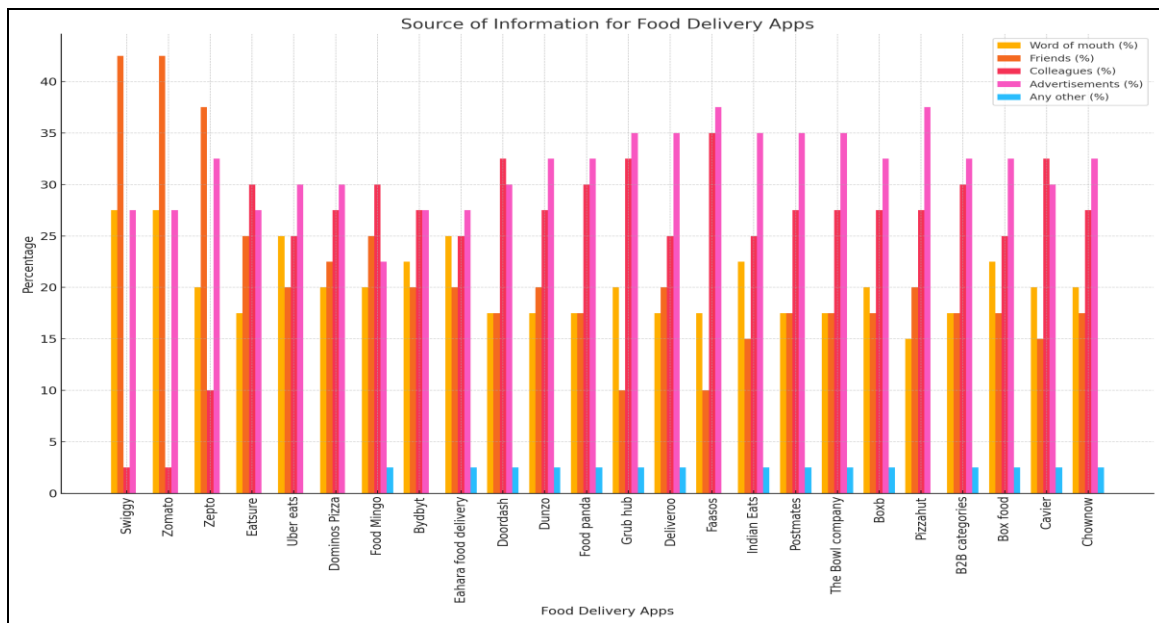


Fig 2: Distribution of Respondents source of information about apps

1.3 Meal Preference by the college going students and purchase pattern

The findings in Figure 3 revealed the respondents' preferences for the kinds of meal orders using different food delivery apps. For morning orders, Swiggy, Eatsure, and Uber Eats emerge as popular choices, catering to early meal requirements. For frequent food orders throughout the day, Zomato, Swiggy, and Uber Eats as recommended options, indicating their adaptability and prevalence. Snack deliveries are commonly associated with platforms like Zepto, Food Mingo, and Bydbyt, reflecting a niche market for quick bites and light meals. Dinner orders mostly incline towards Swiggy, Zomato, and Eatsure, showing these platforms' dominance in providing evening meals. In case of confectionery goods, Food Mingo, Bydbyt, and Dominos

Pizza are favored choices, indicating a preference for sweets and treats among users. Beverage orders, on the other hand, are frequently placed on Uber Eats, Eatsure, and Zepto, highlighting these platforms' popularity in facilitating drink deliveries. Lastly, for dessert cravings, Zepto, Uber Eats, and Dominos Pizza emerge as popular options, emphasizing the diversity of choices available for satisfying sweet cravings through food delivery services. Swiggy and Zomato appears to be adaptable platforms that provide a variety of meal options, such as breakfast, lunches, snacks, and dinner. For breakfast, lunch, snacks, and drinks, Uber Eats is recommended. The data shows that users have a wide range of variety of tastes, suggesting that different apps are suitable for various meal types and circumstances.

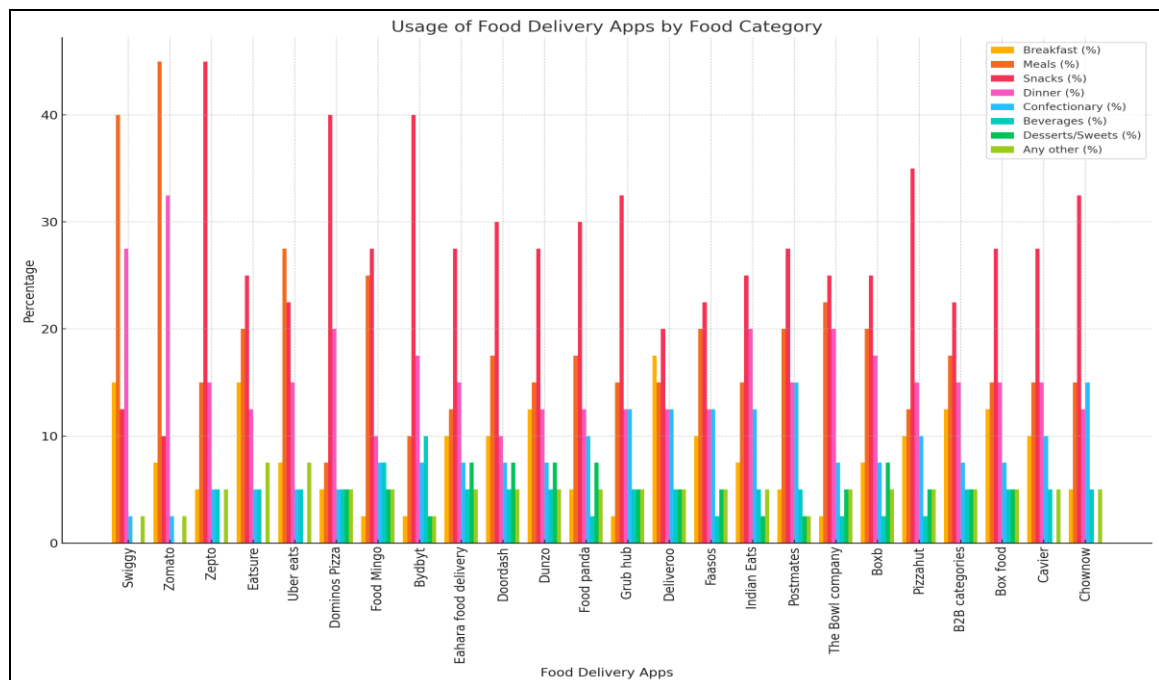


Fig 3: Distribution of Meal Preference of College Going students

1.4 Purchase Pattern of college going students through online

The purchasing patterns among college students in Hyderabad regarding different food categories are varied in Table 1. For breakfast items, 42.50% of respondents buy them once a month, while half of the respondents make occasional purchases. Only a small fraction 7.50% buy breakfast frequently or very frequently. Regarding meals, 30% purchase them once a month, 52% buy occasionally, and 17.50% purchase meals frequently or very frequently. In case of Snacks similar observations were noticed, with 25% buying once a month, 55% occasionally, and 20%

frequently. Confectionary items are purchased once a month by 32.50% of respondents, while 55% buy occasionally, and 12.50% purchase them frequently or very frequently. Beverages follow a similar pattern, with 32.50% buying once a month, 55% occasionally, and 12.50% frequently. Lastly, desserts are bought once a month by 32.50%, occasionally by 60%, and frequently by 7.50%. The purchasing behaviours reflect a mix of regular consumption habits and occasional treats among college students, highlighting opportunities for food delivery apps to cater to varied preferences and frequencies of orders.

Table 1: Distribution of Purchase Pattern of college going students through online

S. No	Purchase pattern	Once in a month	%	Occasionally	%	F	%	VF	%
1	Breakfast	17	42.50	20	50.00	2	5.00	1	2.50
2	Meals	12	30.00	21	52.50	6	15.0	1	2.50
3	Snacks	10	25.00	22	55.00	8	20.0		-
4	Confect-ionary	13	32.50	22	55.00	3	7.50	2	5.00
5	Beverages	13	32.50	22	55.00	5	12.5		-
6	Desserts/ sweets	13	32.50	24	60.00	3	7.50		-
F: Frequently (5-8 times a month) VF: Very frequently (more than 8 times a month)									

These results imply that while a smaller fraction of respondents make purchases once a month or more frequently, most respondents tend to use meal delivery apps at irregular intervals.

1.5 Purpose of buying food faced by the college going students

Respondents' usage patterns and motivations for ordering food through delivery apps vary across different situations in Table 2. For special occasions, 12.50% frequently make purchases, while 77.50% do so occasionally, indicating a

preference for these platforms during celebrations. Official occasions see a lesser frequency, with 7.50% frequently ordering and 65% doing so sometimes, suggesting occasional use for work-related events. Hunger leads 35% to order frequently, while taste preferences influence 25% of respondents. Seeking variety motivates 32.50% to order frequently and offers attract 22.50% regularly. Free delivery is a significant factor for 25%, and 20% order when feeling lazy to cook. 25% use these apps for gifting, and 20% do so during illness and occasions stimulating users to engage with food delivery services.

Table 2: Distribution of Purpose of buying food faced by the college going students

S. No	Purpose of buying food	Frequently	%	Sometimes	%	Never	%
1	Special occasions	5	12.50	31	77.50	4	10.00
2	Official occasions	3	7.50	26	65.00	11	27.50
3	Hunger	14	35.00	24	60.00	2	5.00
4	Taste	10	25.00	25	62.50	5	12.50
5	Variety	13	32.50	24	60.00	3	7.50
6	Offers/ discounts	9	22.50	26	65.00	5	12.50
7	Free delivery	10	25.00	25	62.50	5	12.50
8	Lazy to cook	8	20.00	16	40.00	16	40.00
9	Gift someone	10	25.00	20	50.00	10	25.00
10	During illness	8	20.00	21	52.50	11	27.50

These findings explain the diverse reasons why individuals use food delivery apps, ranging from convenience to specific occasions and preferences. It also highlights varying usage patterns across different purposes by the respondents.

1.6 Quantity of the food ordered

Respondents' experiences with food quantity when ordering through delivery apps vary significantly observed in Figure 4. While 22.50% frequently encounter inadequate quantity issues, 45% experience this sometimes, indicating a

significant portion facing challenges with portion sizes. On the other hand, 42.50% frequently find the quantity of food to be self-sufficient, with 50% experiencing this sometimes, suggesting a majority who are generally satisfied with the portion sizes provided. Excess quantity is less common, with 17.50% frequently receiving more than expected and 47.50% encountering this occasionally. Overall, while some users face challenges with inadequate or excess quantities, a significant proportion finds the portion sizes to be adequate and satisfactory.



Fig 4: Distribution of Quantity of food ordered and food waste

These results imply that while a smaller fraction of respondents make purchases once a month or more frequently, the bulk of respondents tend to use meal delivery apps. These results says that a significant proportion of participants believe the amount of food they order via delivery apps to be sufficient or enough. Nonetheless, a significant proportion also experiences problems with either insufficient or excessive quantity, suggesting that portion control and order accuracy may be strengthened.

1.7 Food wastage

The findings in Figure 5 reveal that there were varied practices regarding leftover food management. A notable 12.50% frequently stored leftover food in the freezer for

later consumption, while 47.50% sometimes opted for this approach. However, 40% never choose to store leftover food in the freezer. When it comes to sharing leftovers, 50% frequently shared them with friends, 42.50% do so sometimes, and only 7.50% never shared. In terms of donating leftovers, 25% frequently donated to others, 57.50% do so sometimes, and 17.50% never engaged in this practice. Interestingly, only 7.50% frequently threw away leftover food, while 30% sometimes discarded it, and the majority i.e. 62.50%, never threw away leftover food. These findings reflect a mix of conservation efforts, sharing behaviours among the surveyed college students, indicating opportunities for promoting sustainable food practices and reducing food waste.

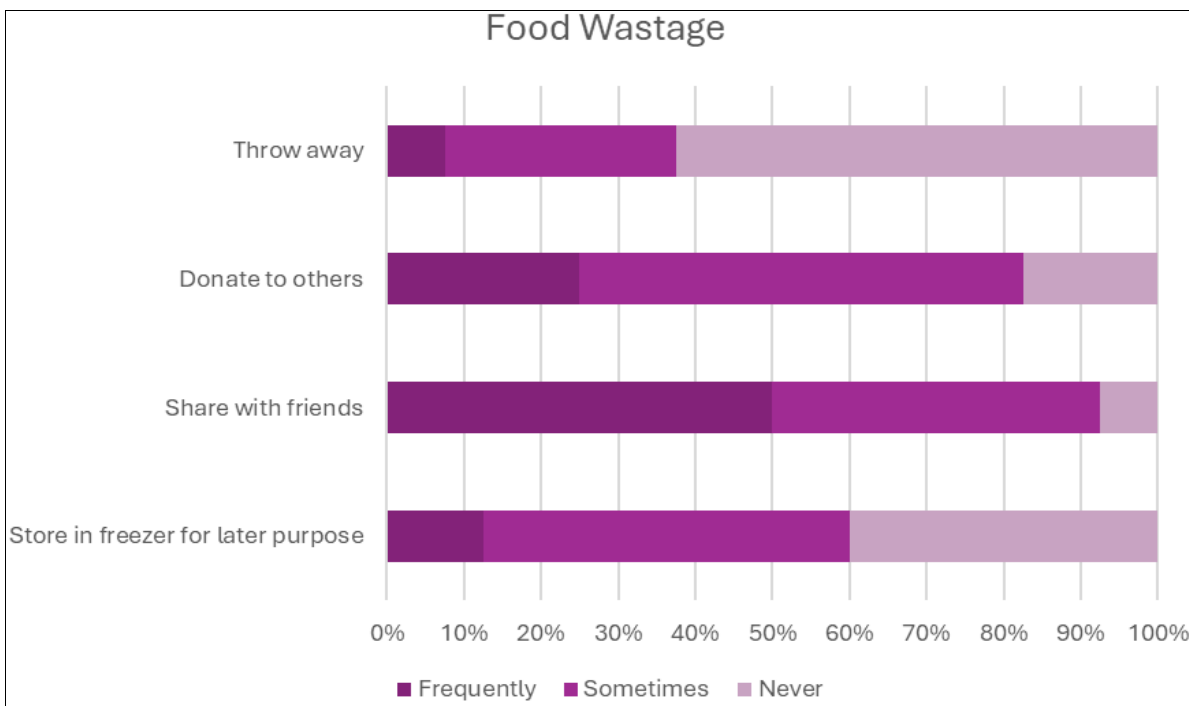


Fig 5: Distribution of Respondents information on food wastage

These findings indicate that a significant portion of respondents either store leftover food for later use, shared it with others, or donated it. However, there is also a notable percentage that ends up throwing away leftover food, suggesting potential areas for reducing food waste.

1.8 Money spent by the students

A significant portion, 50%, frequently spent less than Rs.200/- on such orders, with 47.50% doing so occasionally, indicating a prevailing preference for budget-friendly options. In the Rs. 201/- to Rs. 500/- range, 17.50% frequently spent, while 67.50% do it sometimes, a

considerable proportion willing to invest a bit more for the meals. Moving up to the Rs. 501/- to Rs. 1000/- range, 17.50% frequently spent, and 42.50% sometimes spent, indicating a smaller but significant section opting for slightly higher-priced orders. It was observed that only 2.50% frequently spent more than Rs.1000/-, with 42.50% occasionally doing so, and 55% never exceeding this amount, demonstrating a general tendency among respondents to stick to more moderate spending levels on food delivery services results coincide that cost is one of the significant variable ^[9] presented in Figure 6.

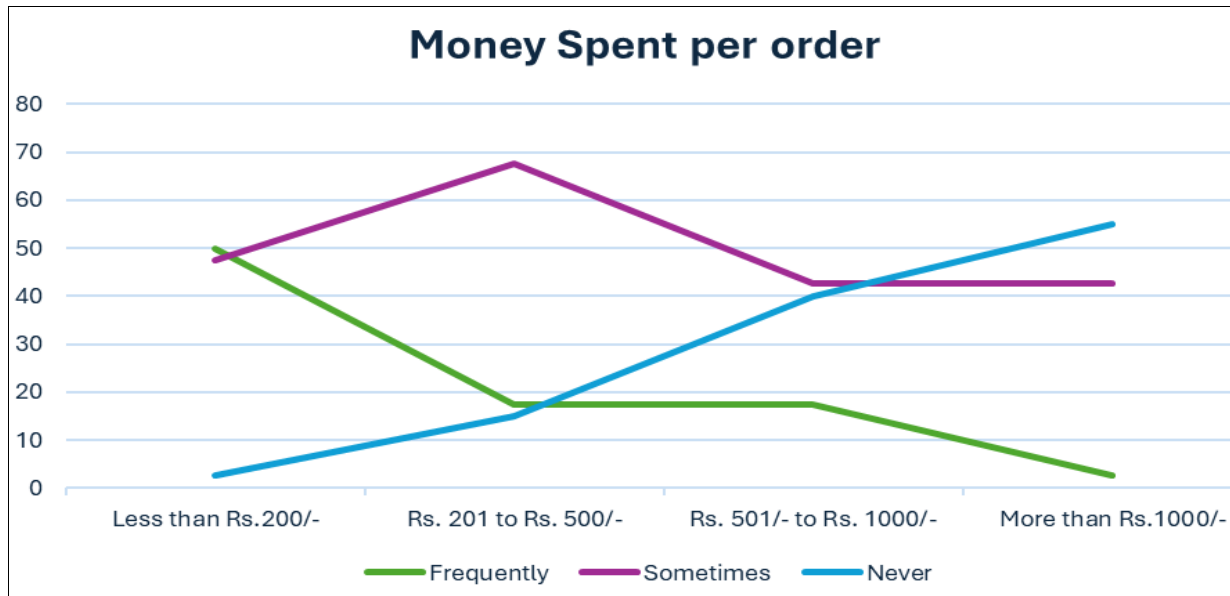


Fig 6: Distribution of Money spent by the students

These findings proved that a significant portion of respondents prefers to spend less than Rs.500/- on food delivery orders. However, there are also respondents who spend higher amounts, with a noticeable percentage spending between Rs. 501/- to Rs. 1000/-.

1.9 Mode of Payment used by the students

These findings indicated that while most respondents do not face problems with online payment methods like credit cards, debit cards, and net banking, a significant percentage encounter issues with specific platforms like PhonePe, Google Pay, and Paytm. Cash on Delivery (COD) also presents challenges for a considerable portion of respondents and the transaction facilities encouraged students to use it to purchase meals ^[10] and tabulated in 3.

1.10 Problems faced by the students during the purchase

The findings in Figure 7 suggests that customers have a wide variety of purchasing habits, with varying frequency levels for various food item types. The study's conclusions highlighted few difficulties that respondents encountered when placing meal delivery app orders. 32.50% of respondents, a sizeable amount, frequently have problems with food quality, indicating a worry about the freshness of the food that is provided. Similarly, 32.50% of the population encountered delays in food delivery, which suggests that the distribution system may be experiencing

operational inefficiencies or logistical difficulties. Furthermore, 27.50% of respondents voiced out concerns regarding food cleanliness while 65% of the respondents reported occasionally having difficulty with them. Twenty-five percent of the respondents expressed concern about excessive packaging, indicating a need for eco-friendly packaging options. Other problems that users of meal delivery apps encounter include food tampering, incorrect food item delivery, and food flavour. The customer pleasure and experience should be improved by pricing, timely delivery, packaging, peer service provider behaviour ^[8]

Table 3: Distribution of Mode of Payment used by the students

S. No	Problems faced	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
1	COD	40.00	37.50	22.50
2	Phone pe	32.50	47.50	20.00
3	Google pay	42.50	42.50	15.00
4	Paytm	32.50	45.00	22.50
5	Credit card	17.50	27.50	55.00
6	Debit card	20.00	25.00	55.00
7	Net banking	22.50	30.00	47.50

1.11 Ranking of Food delivery App

Food taste was one of the important criteria that users found necessary, with 50 % of respondents selecting Swiggy and 27.50% favouring Zomato in this regard ^[5]. Another

important factor was reasonable prices, with 37.50% of respondents believing that Eatsure and Zomato offered fair rates, and 37.50% believing that Zomato did. A lower proportion of respondents prioritized delivery speed, with

Swiggy and Zomato topping this category too. Only a small percentage of users were satisfied with the offers and discounts, with Postmates standing out at 35.00% presented in Figure 8.

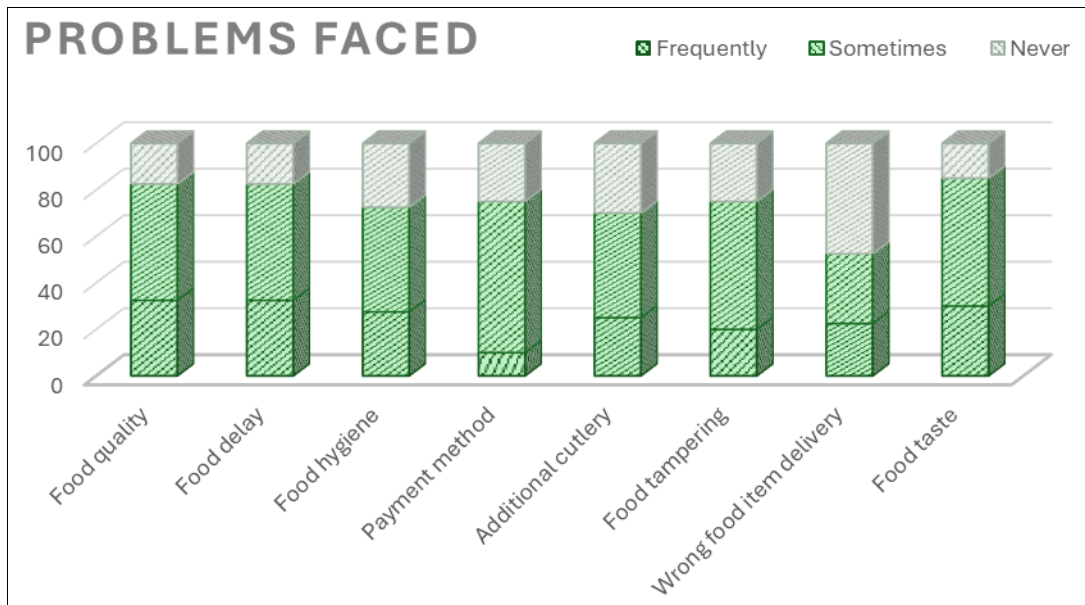


Fig 7: Distribution of problems faced by the students during the purchase

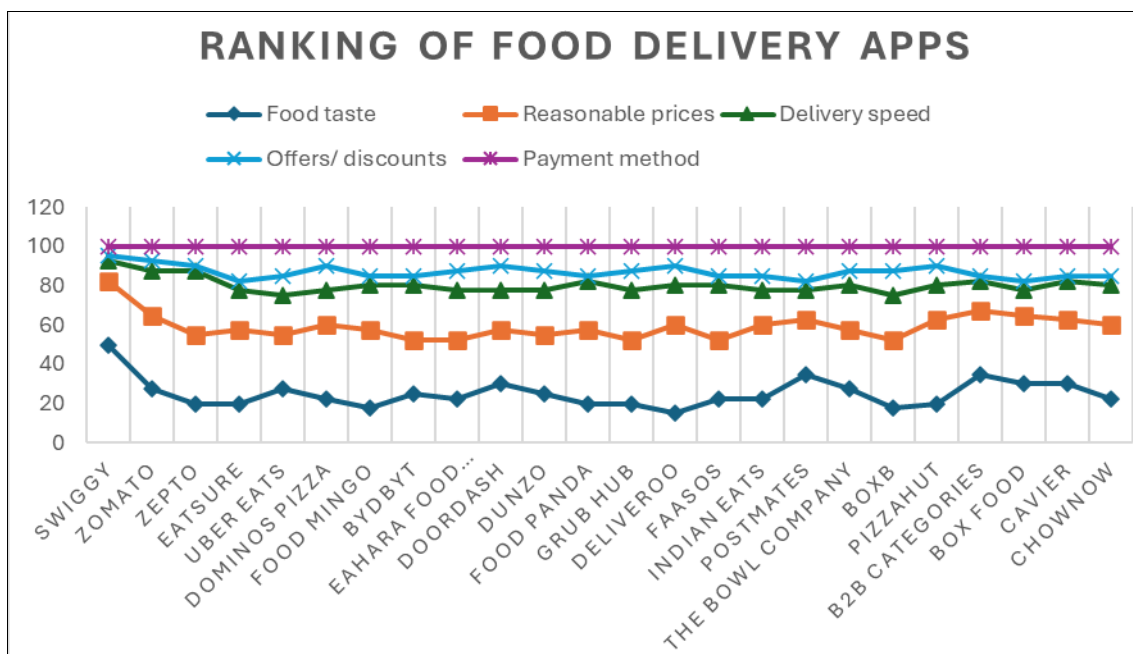


Fig 8: Distribution of Ranking of Food Delivery Apps

Users' preferences for specific apps were also influenced by their payment methods; although debit cards were commonly utilized, they are not the main deciding criteria. Overall, these results highlighted the variety of aspects that users consider when selecting meal delivery applications.

Conclusion

The study on food delivery app usage among college students in Hyderabad reveals several important perceptions. First, it draws attention to the dominance of Swiggy and Zomato, which are well-liked and have substantial market presence due to their high adoption rates

among respondents. Secondly, Uber Eats, Pizzahut, and Dominos Pizza fall behind slightly behind the leading competitors. On the other hand, less well-known apps have difficulty in purchasing with college students, suggesting a competitive market environment.

The study further clarified the variables affecting app awareness and usage, emphasizing the critical roles that referrals by friends and word-of-mouth. Advertising also helps to increase the awareness of apps, specifically on famous platforms. Additionally, a variety of meal types and situations are catered by the varied offerings of different apps, reflecting the diversity of interests and tastes among

users.

The respondents' usage patterns are uneven, with the majority choosing infrequent usage and a smaller segment making frequent purchases. This implies that a wide range of factors, including convenience, special occasions, and taste preferences, influence individuals' purchasing behaviours. The report concludes by highlighting the nature of the food delivery app business, which is influenced by user preferences, advertising tactics, and the wide range of competitive apps.

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