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SERVICES FOR SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

The Consumers' Perspective on Food Delivery Applications: Insights from Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

In today's technology-driven era, online platforms and applications have revolutionized various services, including food delivery and offering unparalleled convenience and efficiency. This surge in the popularity of digital solutions is driven by consumers' growing technological dependency and their quest for seamless experiences. Consequently, more restaurants outsource delivery services to meet evolving consumer preferences. This study provides business operators with valuable insights into consumer preferences and behaviors regarding online food delivery applications. Specifically, it identifies the determinants influencing the adoption of such apps and explores the most popular apps among the Saudi subpopulation. Additionally, this study investigated the factors associated with the actual usage of online food delivery services. An analysis of the collected data revealed critical factors shaping consumer choices in food delivery services, notably the impact of social media reputation and advertisements. The proximity of restaurants has emerged as a significant determinant, profoundly influencing customer satisfaction and app preferences. Interestingly, while cost did not significantly drive consumers towards online food delivery services, the Jahez app was the preferred choice because of its exemplary customer service. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for informed strategic decision-making within the food delivery ecosystem. Moreover, recommendations for future research are provided to foster a deeper understanding of and innovation in the online food delivery domain.

Keywords: Food delivery applications, Customers' satisfaction, E-commerce, Consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of technology has revolutionized our daily routines, providing access to a plethora of services through online platforms and apps. Notably, food delivery applications have witnessed a surge in popularity in recent years, empowering customers to order meals from their preferred restaurants using their smartphones conveniently. These platforms boast extensive culinary options, simplifying the process of satisfying culinary cravings (Dirsehan &

Cankat, 2021). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further propelled the adoption of delivery apps, facilitating adherence to social distancing guidelines and bolstering safety measures by eliminating the necessity for direct contact during food delivery. Consequently, numerous restaurants have embraced this trend by outsourcing delivery services to accommodate the escalating demand. However, the success of food delivery applications hinges greatly on customer satisfaction (Jadhav, Titus, Babu, & Chinnaiyan, 2023). Various factors play a role in shaping customer satisfaction within the realm of food delivery applications, including the diversity of restaurant choices available on the app, the quality of food packaging, and the application's design and user interface (Jadhav et al., 2023). Indeed, consumer preferences for online meal ordering and delivery services are increasingly being influenced by technological integration and swift delivery times. Although quality and pricing retain their significance in consumer decision making, the multifaceted nature of preferences and choices necessitates a thorough examination. Hence, this study focuses on identifying the pivotal factors that support or impede the adoption of online food delivery services in Saudi Arabia given the escalating reliance on digital solutions for food procurement and delivery.

By scrutinizing the intricacies of consumer behavior and preferences, this study attempts to provide business operators with the insights required to make well-informed strategic decisions, heighten customer satisfaction, and carve out a distinct identity in a fiercely competitive market. The investigation began with an extensive review of existing literature, focusing on the evolving landscape of online food ordering and delivery services. Subsequently, analysis of the data collected through online surveys provides valuable insights into customer perceptions and preferences. The concluding sections delineate findings and inferences, laying the groundwork for informed strategic decision-making for businesses in the food delivery ecosystem. Additionally, recommendations are articulated for future researchers to foster an enriched understanding and innovation in the online food delivery domain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of online food delivery applications has significantly transformed the food industry by providing convenience, speed, and accessibility to a wide range of consumers. This literature review aims to synthesize and integrate research findings on the various factors affecting online food delivery applications and their impact on consumer behavior and satisfaction.

Food Delivery Applications

Food delivery applications, commonly known as delivery apps, are digital platforms that revolutionize the food industry, allowing users to order meals from restaurants and deliver them to their preferred locations. These apps offer a diverse range of cuisine and dining options from various restaurants, enabling customers to browse menus, place orders, make payments, and track deliveries via mobile or web-based interfaces. Their popularity has surged in recent years owing to their convenience, user friendliness, and access to diverse food options, making them an indispensable part of the food industry ecosystem.

Researchers have examined delivery applications from several perspectives. Arora et al. (2023) examined the elements influencing users' intentions to use meal delivery apps and highlighted the importance of various factors during the pandemic. Ng et al. (2023) proposed a model that analyzed the factors affecting continuous use intention, emphasizing timesaving and various

food choices. Behzad et al. (2023) investigated the drivers of continuance intention by integrating the technology continuance theory with perceived value and food safety perceptions.

Xu, Yan, and Tong (2021) investigated the impact of waiting times on order cancellations, they found that consumers usually cancel their orders due to long waiting times for service production, but not for long delivery time emphasizing the need for service providers to minimize wait times. Ma, Webb, and Schwartz (2021) attributed the growth in food delivery services to the COVID-19 crisis but highlighted challenges for restaurant profitability. Das (2018) explored consumer perceptions of online food delivery services, identified the drivers and deterrents of usage. Sushant (2023) discussed the advantages and challenges of ordering food online, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The studies presented in this review shed light on various factors that influence customers' intentions to adopt food delivery applications. The proliferation of food delivery applications has not only reshaped the food industry landscape, but also fundamentally altered consumer behavior and expectations. By streamlining the ordering process to provide a diverse array of culinary options, these platforms have revolutionized how people access and enjoy their meals. However, amidst this technological advancement, customer satisfaction remains a crucial aspect.

Food Delivery Applications and Customers' Satisfactions

The relationship between food delivery applications and customer satisfaction is a complex interplay influenced by various factors. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) underscore the pivotal role of consumer satisfaction in marketing, linking it to post-purchase behaviors such as repeat purchasing and brand loyalty. Wreden (2007) emphasized the subjective nature of customer satisfaction and the importance of aligning business objectives with customer expectations.

Saad (2021) highlights the critical role of factors, such as order accuracy, delivery time, service quality, and menu diversity, in shaping customer satisfaction. These elements directly impact customers' perceptions of their dining experience and influence their likelihood of using food delivery applications in the future.

Moreover, insights from Prasetyo et al. (2021) and Suki and Suki (2011) emphasize the importance of understanding customer motivations and preferences in driving satisfaction and loyalty. Factors such as price, information quality, and service convenience play significant roles in shaping customers' attitudes toward food delivery apps. Additionally, Xin et al. (2023), Smith and Heriyati (2023) and Lin et al. (2023) delved into the specific attributes of food delivery apps and their impacts on perceived benefits, satisfaction, and loyalty. These studies highlight the importance of mobile app service quality, food satisfaction, and user experience in fostering positive perceptions and encouraging repeat usage.

Zhuang et al. (2021) discussed the relationship between e-service quality and customer satisfaction from a nuanced perspective. While trust, convenience, and other factors may influence consumer attitudes, their direct impact on customer satisfaction may vary, suggesting the need for further exploration. Overall, these studies highlight the multifaceted nature of

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customer satisfaction in the context of food delivery. By understanding and addressing consumers' diverse needs and preferences, businesses can enhance their service offerings, foster positive experiences, and build long-term relationships with their customer base in a competitive food delivery market.

Table 1: The sex frequency and sample of the participants.

Gender	Yes	No	Total
Male	59 (74.67%)	20 (25.32%)	79 (29.37%)
Female	165 (86.84%)	25 (13.15)	190 (70.63%)
Total	224	45	269

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. The primary objective of this study was to identify the critical factors that support and oppose the adoption of online food delivery services in Saudi Arabia.
2. The secondary objective was to assist business operators in online food delivery applications to maintain customer satisfaction through an analysis of the actual use of online food delivery services to determine the factors that encourage the choice of online food delivery services.
3. To identify the most popular delivery app used by the Saudi subpopulation.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Consumers in Saudi Arabia who ordered food online were the focus of the survey. This study is confined to the Saudi community and examines services that deliver food from restaurants directly to customers. The primary focus is on online food applications that cater to client preferences by providing home delivery services.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained through an online survey comprising of two distinct sections. The initial section aimed to collect demographic details from the participants, including gender, age, education, type of employment, and income. The second section concentrated on the study variables with relevant questions adapted from a prior study conducted by Das (2018). To align with the characteristics of the local population, the survey was translated into Arabic, the official language of Saudi Arabia. The translated survey was rigorously reviewed and corrected by Arabic language experts to ensure its linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness. The survey incorporated questions structured on a 5-point Likert scale, allowing participants to express their responses on a spectrum from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). For participant selection, a simple random sampling method was employed to ensure a representative and unbiased study sample. A total of 269 responses were collected through the survey to form the basis for the data analysis and the findings of this study.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The general characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The data showed that 79 (29.4%) of the participants were male, and 190 (70.6%) were female. The majority of online food-ordering users were female. Specifically, 86.84% of female participants answered "yes"

when asked if they used food ordering services, compared to 74.67% of the male participants. The significant differences in online food ordering between genders could potentially be attributed to cultural factors. In some cases, cultural norms may discourage females from dining outside their homes, leading to a higher reliance on food delivery services. According to Table 2, the majority of participants were aged between 15 and 25 years, accounting for 53% of the total participants. In terms of occupation, over half of the participants were students (50.6%), and diploma degree holders represented the smallest group (5.6 %). Income-wise, the largest group of participants (62.8%) earned 5000 or less Saudi Riyals (SR) as they were mostly students, and the smallest proportion (5.9%) had an income of 15001 SR or above.

Table 2: The demographic of participants.

Independent Variables	Percentage
Age	
15-25 Y	53.5%
26-35 Y	26.8%
36-45 Y	13.8%
46 or above	5.9%
Education	
High school	29%
Diploma	5.6%
Bachelor	52%
High education	13.4%
Income	
5000 or less	60.2%
5001-10000	19%
10001-15000	14.9%
15001 or above	5.9%

As depicted in Figure 1, 83.3% of participants across both genders used online food delivery services, while 16.7% did not.

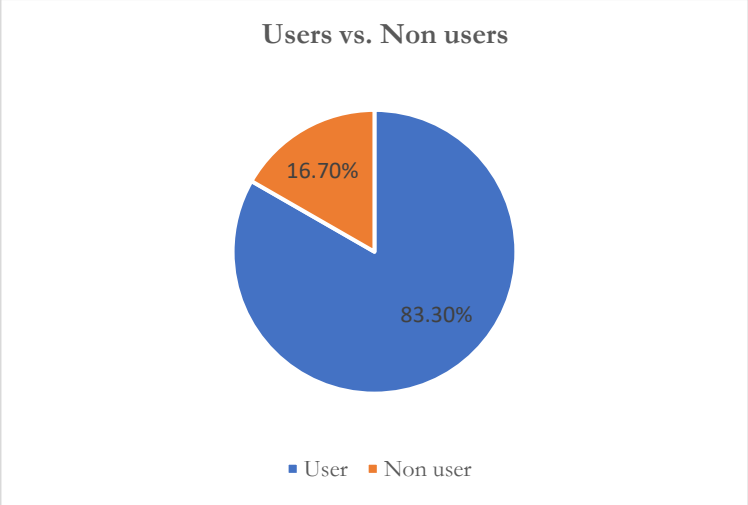


Figure 1: The User and Non-user of food delivery service.

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Reliability Analysis

To analyze the Internal Consistency among the factors that encourage them to opt for online food delivery services, Cronbach's alpha was calculated, and the results are presented in Table 3. The reliability test for six items—availability, home delivery, payment, price, and choice of restaurants yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.863. This score indicates a high level of internal consistency for these items. It is noteworthy that in most social science research contexts, an alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable.

Table 3: Reliability test for six items.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha*	Cronbach's Alpha on Standardized Items	No. of Items (N)
.863	.866	6

Analysis of Factors Supporting and Opposing Online Food Delivery Adoption

Table 4: Mean rank of factors supporting online food ordering app adoption

Six Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Responds'
Daily availability	4.7	1.9	269
Homedelivery	5.2	1.6	269
Easy pay options	4.9	1.6	269
Best price	4.7	1.5	269
Easy-to-use	4.5	1.7	269
choices of restaurant	2.9	1.7	269

The data in Table 4 display the mean rank of the factors that encourage customers to opt for online food delivery services, as opposed to traditional ordering. Home delivery ranks highest and is most attractive to customers, with a mean (M) value of 5.2 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.6. Easy payment options followed with an M value of 4.9, an SD of 1.6, and daily availability and best price both had an M value of 4.7, with SDs of 1.9 and 1.5, respectively. The ease of use had an M value of 4.5 and an SD of 1.7. The choice of restaurants was ranked lowest, with an M value of 2.9 and an SD of 1.7.

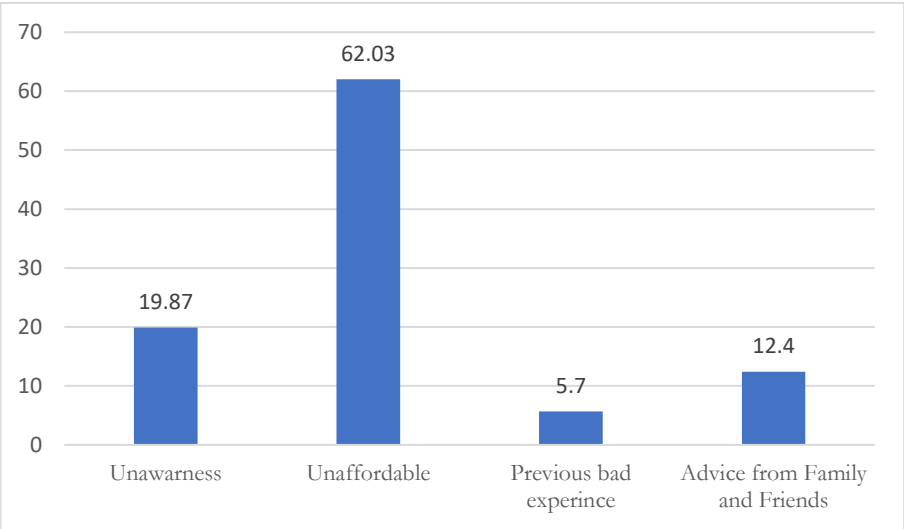


Figure 2: Factors that prevent the use of food online applications.

To determine the factors that oppose the adoption of food ordering applications, four items were incorporated into the survey questions: unawareness of the food delivery service, associated costs of ordering, previous personal bad experiences, and advice or warnings from family or friends against using the service. As shown in Figure 2, 5.7% of respondents abstained from using the service because of previous bad experiences. Other predominant reasons included the cost of the service (62.03%), unawareness of the service (19.87%), and advice from family or friends (12.4%).

Analysis of the Actual Use of Online Food Delivery Services

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of responses were influenced by the rewards of the application (37.86 %) to use online food delivery apps. The location of restaurants was the second most influential factor in the use of food delivery apps (30.66%). Other factors included Reputation in social media (10.93%), advertisements (10.4%), and previous bad online experiences (8.6%). The factor with the lowest percentage was online review (1.46%).

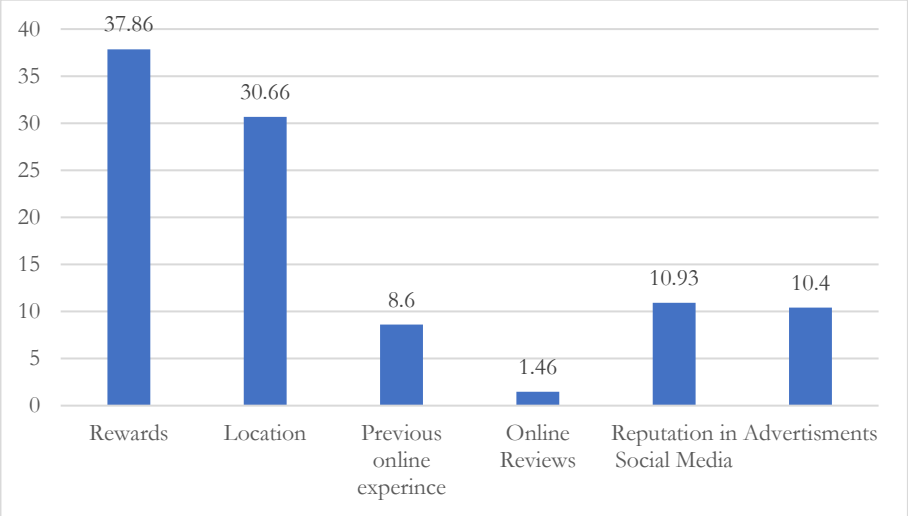


Figure 3: Factors that influence customers to actually use food delivery apps.

To identify the factors influencing participants' choice of food ordering apps, they were presented with four thoughts: better discounts, wider choice of restaurants, superior customer service, and efficient online delivery. As suggested by Das (2018), these factors were evaluated in the context of four popular applications: Mrsool, Talabat, HungerStation, and Jahez (detailed in Table 5).

Table 5: Users' evaluation of four aspects of food ordering apps services (discount-choices of restaurants-customer services- on-time delivery). (Frequency & Percentage).

	On-time delivery	Customer service	Better choice of restaurants	Better discount
Mrsool	17 (68%)	14 (56%)	15 (60%)	5 (20%)
Talabat	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Hungerstation	54 (72%)	54 (72%)	54 (72%)	34 (45.3%)
Jahez	91 (81.2%)	84 (75%)	65 (58%)	65 (58%)

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Jahez emerged as the leading application, boasting the best discounts (58%), on-time delivery (81%), and customer service (75%). In contrast, Hunger Station was preferred by a significant proportion (72%) of the participants, primarily because of its diverse restaurant options.
Jahez's popularity is further corroborated by Table 6. When participants were queried on their preferences among the four food delivery apps, 112 out of 224 (50%) favored Jahez, which was potentially attributable to its excellent home delivery service. HungerStation was preferred by 75 (33.4%) respondents, while Talabat was at the bottom, confirming its lower appeal to the surveyed individuals.

Table 6: The preference of food delivery applications.

Online application	Frequency	Percent
Mrsool	25	11.1
Talabat	2	0.8
HungerStation	75	33.4
Jahez	112	50
I do not know	10	4.4
Total	224	100.0

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study enriches the existing body of research by offering insights into consumer preferences in Saudi Arabia regarding the adoption and use of online delivery services.

Convenience and Efficiency

Home delivery services have emerged as major factors in adopting food delivery. Home delivery addresses the fundamental need for convenience and time-saving, which are crucial considerations for modern consumers. Service efficiency has also emerged as an important factor in customer satisfaction, as outlined by the appropriateness of food delivery. These findings on the significance of food delivery services and their efficiency indicate that ensuring prompt and reliable delivery is crucial for customer satisfaction. By utilizing food delivery apps, individuals can enjoy the convenience of delivering their favorite meals directly to their doorsteps, eliminating the need to travel to restaurants or prepare meals at home. This underscores the importance of food delivery services focusing on efficient delivery operations to meet customer expectations and enhance overall satisfaction. Delayed deliveries not only diminish satisfaction but also lead to order cancellations, affecting businesses financially. The business implications of timeliness as a significant factor in customer satisfaction suggest that food delivery services should prioritize efficient logistics and delivery operations. This may involve optimizing delivery routes, investing in technology for real-time tracking, or providing incentives for timely delivery. A focus on prompt service can lead to improved customer retention and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately benefiting the brand's reputation and bottom line.

Rewards Offered

The significance of rewards as the most significant factor in the use and choice of food delivery apps can be attributed to the strong influence of financial incentives on consumer behavior. The data from this study and insights from various researchers indicate that rewards such as loyalty programs, discounts, and special offers play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining customers.

The findings in Figure 3, which indicate that the majority of respondents are influenced by rewards when using online food delivery apps, underscore the importance of financial incentives compared to other factors. Moreover, the business implications of rewards as a significant factor in the use of food delivery apps suggest that businesses should prioritize attractive and competitive rewards to entice and retain consumers. This may involve the implementation of loyalty programs, the provision of discounts, and the creation of special offers. By doing so, food delivery services can enhance user engagement, build customer loyalty, and differentiate themselves in a competitive market, potentially leading to increased usage and customer retention. Additionally, this study emphasizes the need for food delivery services that emphasize the value of financial rewards when designing incentive programs to attract and retain customers. This aligns with the research of Song, Jeon, and Jeon (2017), which analyzed the influence of delivery app usage factors on customer satisfaction and reuse intention, highlighting the significance of rewards in shaping customer behavior. In summary, rewards appear as the most significant factor in the use and choice of food delivery apps because of their strong influence on consumer behavior, potential to attract and retain customers, and ability to enhance user engagement and customer loyalty.

Location of Restaurants

Restaurant location is a significant factor that influences customers' choices of food delivery apps because of its crucial role in customer decision-making. The proximity of restaurants plays a pivotal role in customer choice, as indicated by the survey results. The business implications of this factor underscore the importance of strategic partnerships and listings to restaurants in optimal locations. By prioritizing partnerships with restaurants in strategic locations, food delivery apps can enhance their overall appeal, improve customer satisfaction, and potentially increase usage and revenue. Additionally, optimizing restaurant selection to meet customer demand in various areas strengthens an app's competitive position. The significance of restaurant location in influencing customers' choices of food delivery apps is rooted in its convenience and accessibility to consumers. Proximity to restaurants ensures timely and efficient delivery, which is essential to customer satisfaction. Moreover, the availability of a diverse range of restaurants nearby provides customers with a wider choice of dining options, further enhancing the appeal of food delivery. In summary, restaurant location is a critical factor influencing customers' choices of food delivery apps because of its impact on convenience, accessibility, and customer satisfaction. By strategically partnering with restaurants in optimal locations, food delivery apps can enhance their appeal and competitive position, ultimately driving increased usage and customer retention.

Customer Service Excellence

Excellence in customer service has positioned Jahez as a superior choice compared to other food delivery apps because of its ability to meet and exceed customer expectations, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. The findings of this study emphasize the pivotal role of customer service in shaping consumer preferences and driving the use of food delivery applications. Jahez's commitment to punctual deliveries and superior customer service resonated with a significant majority of consumers, leading to its distinguished standing as the leader in the online food delivery arena. The significance of customer service excellence in influencing Jahez's popularity is corroborated by Son and Park (2013) and Song et al. (2017), who emphasize the positive impact of service quality on overall satisfaction with delivery

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applications. These findings underscore the importance of prioritizing and maintaining exceptional customer service within food delivery apps, which is crucial for attracting and retaining customers. Furthermore, the study's demographic analysis revealed that a significant proportion of users were female, with time constraints playing a significant role in their reliance on the convenience of ordering food online. Jahez's exemplary home delivery service likely resonated with this demographic and aligned with their specific needs and preferences. In summary, Jahez's excellence in customer service has propelled its superiority over other apps by effectively meeting customer expectations, enhancing satisfaction, and catering to the specific needs of its diverse customer base, particularly in the context of Saudi society.

Gender Differences in Usage

The finding that more females than males utilized online food delivery services can be attributed to gender-based discrepancies in service usage, particularly within the context of Saudi society. In Saudi Arabia, females often bear the primary responsibility for home care and meal preparation, reflecting traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Given the notably high percentage of working women in the country, time constraints play a significant role, leading them to rely on the convenience of ordering food online to fulfill their responsibilities efficiently. This underscores the necessity for food delivery platforms to carefully consider gender-specific preferences and adapt their services and marketing strategies accordingly, ensuring that they meet the specific needs of diverse customer bases. The data from this study highlight the influence of sex-specific roles and time constraints on the utilization of online food delivery services. This underscores the importance of understanding and addressing gender-based discrepancies in service usage, particularly in the unique cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

Looking Ahead

The food service industry has been set for substantial growth, with a projected annual growth rate of 9.8 use for delivery applications. This surge is expected to elevate revenue to an estimated 2259 million dollars by 2024 (Asfoura, Aljuraywi, Alhajjaj & Alzahed, 2021). These figures highlight the significant potential of the food delivery application market. However, this growth is challenging, particularly in the face of a highly competitive business landscape. To effectively navigate these challecges and sustain success, businesses must remain adaptable to evolving consumer preferences, which are often influenced by generational shifts.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

Online food ordering, a relatively recent adoption in Saudi Arabia, is gaining global traction. The spread of Internet accessibility and the fast-paced nature of contemporary lifestyles have urged businesses to fulfill an emerging consumer demand: doorstep food delivery. A nuanced understanding of this consumer dynamic is instrumental in unlocking the expansive potential of e-commerce given its overarching impacts on the economy, corporate landscapes, and individual lifestyles.

This study delves into pivotal factors influencing consumer tendencies towards food delivery services, spotlighting aspects like “social media reputation” and “advertising usefulness.” The findings emphasize the key role of “Restaurant’s location" and “Rewards of the application” in

shaping customer satisfaction and propelling the usage of food delivery apps to save time, money and efforts.

Jahez enjoys a distinguished standing among service providers, a sentiment echoed by a significant majority of consumers in our survey. This popularity is attributed predominantly to the brand's commitment to punctual deliveries and superior customer service. Jahez is the leader in the online food delivery arena.

However, a few limitations of the study include the small sample size and the demographic representativeness concerning the dominance of female participants and students, which potentially limits the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation related to the cross-sectional design of this study is that it captures a snapshot of consumer behavior at a single point in time, which may not capture changes over time or long-term trends.

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