

Don't mess with me! Exploring the relationship between social anxiety and the adoption of food delivery platforms

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Introduction. Food Delivery Applications (FDAs) provide convenience by allowing consumers to order food, make electronic payments, and set delivery locations with ease, while technological advancements have enabled these platforms to personalize recommendations and offers based on user data, creating a highly individualized consumption experience (Pigatto et al., 2017; Farah et al., 2022). This level of personalization makes the purchasing process more efficient and appealing to consumers, encouraging continued use (Goyal et al., 2023). However, there is growing consumer attention to sustainability, ethics, and locally sourced products (Banerjee and Quinn, 2023), which is directly impacted by the predatory model of third-party delivery apps such as Glovo and Just Eat, particularly regarding the labor force of riders and local impacts (Moraes & Betancor Nuez, 2023). Based on this new consumer perception and the unsustainability of the current business model, this study aims to understand the reasons behind the adoption of delivery platforms. **Brief Literature Review.** Previous studies have sought to gather motivations and barriers for consumers to adopt and continue using delivery apps (Chetan Panse et al., 2019; Belarmino et al., 2021; Goyal et al., 2023). Ray et al. (2019) applied the Use & Gratification (U&G) Theory and identified eight key gratifications that drive the use of delivery apps: Convenience, Societal Pressure, Customer Experience, Delivery Experience, Restaurant Search, Quality Control, Listing, and Ease-of-Use. In any case, there remains a gap in identifying consumer motivations from a local perspective, particularly in relation to the shortcomings of the current business models employed by delivery platforms. **Methodology.** A netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020) was used to examine the factors that lead to the use of FDAs. Initially, the investigative phase mapped various online documents about the theme and keywords were isolated. Transversal keywords across most of these documents were identified to find correlations in the form of hashtags, queries, and community names on various social platforms. A parallel phase of research on Reddit Italy was conducted identifying 29 conversation topics and a total of 2,162 comments. 294 visual elements were collected to compose the dataset. In the immersive phase of data engagement, an immersion journal was used to capture valuable insights, self-reflections, and contextual information to support data analysis through the lens of U&G theory. **Results.** Findings suggest that two main blocks of perceived gratification for the consumer can be highlighted: convenience and the avoidance of social contact. The first is a well-established motivator for the use of delivery apps in the literature (Chetan Panse et al., 2019), while the second has not been extensively explored. Consumers adopt FDAs not only for the convenience of receiving products at home but also to avoid social

interaction. Users who openly discuss using delivery apps to avoid interaction with others have identified the advantage of these platforms in helping them escape situations ranging from anxiety when speaking with a stranger on the phone to place an order at a restaurant to the discomfort of feeling socially judged when modifying traditional dishes or products. For these consumers, the elimination of human contact is perceived as a significant gratification of using FDA. **Conclusion.** The study highlights how FDA serve as a tool for individuals with social phobias to avoid human interaction, which is seen as a gratification of this use. Companies can better cater to socially anxious consumers and align with their personality traits, thereby enhancing user experience and satisfaction. The study offers a fresh perspective on consumer behavior contrasting with prior findings that anxious users resist adopting new technologies (Yuan et al., 2022; Kamal Abdien & Ashour, 2024). Future research could expand the context, as this study is limited to the Italian setting, where cultural aspects of commensality are traditional (Koponen et al., 2022; Warde et al., 2019). While this may provide valuable insights, it can also serve as a limiting factor.

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