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MOTIVATION, CHALLENGES AND SATISFACTION REGARDING STAKEHOLDERS' USE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS, GHANA

RHODA NANCY ASHIA BAMPOE-ADDY

2026

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MOTIVATION, CHALLENGES AND SATISFACTION REGARDING STAKEHOLDERS' USE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS, GHANA

BY

RHODA NANCY ASHIA BAMPOE-ADDY

Thesis submitted to the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management of the Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hospitality Management

MARCH, 2026

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature …… Date ……..

Name: Rhoda Nancy Ashia Bampoe-Addy

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital food services (DFS) in Ghana reflects broader technological advancement and evolving consumer lifestyles. However, existing research has predominantly focused on customers, with limited attention given to delivery agents and food service providers. This study examined stakeholders' experiences with Digital Food Services in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana. Specifically, it sought to explore the motivations driving DFS adoption, examine stakeholder experiences, assess constraints in DFS utilisation, and investigate factors influencing satisfaction and continuance usage. The study was grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), and Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). A qualitative research design was adopted to facilitate an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives. Using convenience and snowball sampling techniques, 38 participants were selected, comprising 12 customers, 13 delivery agents, and 13 food service providers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by tailored interview protocols and analysed thematically.

Findings revealed that DFS adoption is influenced by technological, socio-economic, and performance-related factors. Customers were motivated by convenience, ease of use, timely delivery, privacy, and improved food accessibility. Delivery agents were driven by flexible working arrangements, reliable payment systems, and employment opportunities, while food service providers adopted DFS to expand market reach, increase revenue, and improve operational efficiency. Stakeholder experiences were multidimensional, encompassing effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional responses. Nevertheless, technological, economic, and operational challenges including poor internet connectivity, high commissions and delivery fees, inaccurate locations, and communication barriers optimal performance. Satisfaction and continuance usage were largely influenced by reliability, efficiency, flexibility, revenue generation, and effective coordination. The study concludes that DFS sustainability depends on aligning stakeholder expectations, infrastructural support, economic fairness, and collaborative value co-creation. It was recommended that enhance effectiveness, sustainability would contribute to stakeholder satisfaction with DFS.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Rev. Enoch Bampoe-Addy, and children, Maud, Mark, Margaret and Isaiah Bampoe-Addy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
DEDICATION	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Background to the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Objectives of the Study	7
Research Questions	8
Significance of the Study	8
Delimitation	9
Definition of Terms	10
Organisation of the Study	11
Chapter Summary	13
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL REVIEW	
Introduction	14
The Concept of Digital Food Services	14
The Concept of Stakeholders	17
Motivation for Using DFS	19

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

The Concept of Stakeholders' Experience 20

Convenience 22

Effectiveness 23

Challenges 24

Concept of Continued Usage 25

Theoretical Foundations of the Study 27

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) 27

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) framework 30

Expectancy-Disconfirmation and Expectancy-Confirmation Theories 32

Conceptual Framework for the Study 35

Chapter Summary 37

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Introduction 39

Motivations Driving the Adoption of DFS Among Various Stakeholders 39

Stakeholders' Experiences with Digital Food Service 42

Customers' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service 42

Delivery Agents' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service 45

Food Service Providers' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service 47

Stakeholders' Challenges with the Use of DFS 49

Customers' Challenges with the Use of DFS 49

Delivery Agents' Challenges with the Use of DFS 51

Food Service Providers' Challenges with the Use of DFS 53

Stakeholders' Satisfaction with the Use of Digital Food Service 55

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Factors Influencing the Continued Use of Digital Food Service Among Stakeholders 58

Chapter Summary 61

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Introduction 62

Study Area 62

Research Philosophy 66

Research Design 68

Target Population 71

Data and Sources 73

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure 73

Research Instruments 76

Pre-Test Pilot Study 77

Training of Field Assistants 79

Actual Fieldwork 80

Fieldwork Challenges 82

Data Processing and Analysis 83

Reliability and Validity Issues 88

Ethical Issues 90

Chapter Summary 91

CHAPTER FIVE: STAKEHOLDERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR USING DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction 92

Customers' Motivations for Using Digital Food Services 92

Convenience and Ease of Use 93

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Timely Delivery and Reliability 95

Privacy and Social Status Considerations 96

Food Accessibility and Variety 97

Delivery Agents' Motivations for Engaging in Digital Food Services (DFS 100

Flexible Working Structure 100

Payment Structure and Financial Reliability 102

Employment Opportunities 103

Ease of Use, Accessibility, and Platform Efficiency 104

Food Service Providers' Motivations for Engaging in Digital Food Service 106

Market Expansion and Customer Growth 106

Operational Efficiency, Timeliness, and Ease of Use 108

Cross-Stakeholder Motivational Patterns 110

Chapter Summary 113

CHAPTER SIX: STAKEHOLDERS' MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction 114

Customers' Experience of Digital Food Services 115

Effectiveness (Goal Achievement) 115

Efficiency (Ease and Speed) 118

Satisfaction (Evaluative Judgement) 119

Delivery Agents' Experience of Digital Food Services 120

Effectiveness (Operational Goal Achievement) 121

Efficiency (Time and Route Optimisation) 122

Satisfaction 123

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Food Service Providers' Experience of Digital Food Services 124

Effectiveness (Order Accuracy and Coordination) 124

Efficiency (Real-Time Synchronisation) 125

Satisfaction 126

Cross-Stakeholder Synthesis 127

Chapter Summary 128

CHAPTER SEVEN: STAKEHOLDERS' CHALLENGES IN USING DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction 129

Customers' Challenge with Digital Food Services 129

High Cost of Delivery Fee or Charges 129

Deception on the Part of Service Provider 130

Poor Connectivity 131

Delivery Agents' Constraints with Digital Food Services 133

Language challenges 133

Delays (Customer/Food service provider) 134

Wrong Location 135

Network Challenges 136

Challenges for Food Service Providers Using Digital Food Services 138

Poor Network 139

Poor Food Tracking System 139

Fee or Price of Delivery 140

Poor Condition of Food 141

Chapter Summary 142

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

CHAPTER EIGHT: STAKEHOLDERS' S SATISFACTION AND CONTINUANCE USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICE

Introduction 144

Customer Satisfaction with Digital Food Services in Accra Metropolis 144

Service Delivery 144

Preferences of Food 145

Effective Communication 146

Delivery Agents' Satisfaction with Digital Food Services in the Accra Metropolis 148

Flexibility and Autonomy of Work 148

Daily Employment Opportunity 149

Food Services Providers' Satisfaction with DFS in the Accra Metropolis 151

Order Accuracy 151

Increase Revenue 152

Customers' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services 153

Efficiency 153

Variety 154

Ease of Use 154

Timeliness 155

Delivery Agents' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services 158

Employment Opportunity 158

Flexibility of Work 159

Food Services Providers' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services in Accra 160

Increase Sales 161

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

Convenience 162

Visibility 162

Chapter Summary 164

CHAPTER NINE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction 165

Summary of the Study 165

Summary of Major Findings 167

Conclusion 170

Contribution to Knowledge 172

Contribution to Practice 173

Recommendations 174

Suggestions for Further Study 176

REFERENCES 179

APPENDICES 233

APPENDIX A: Profile of Interviewees/Study Participants 233

APPENDIX B: In- Depth Interview Guide for Stakeholders' 236

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

University of Cape Coast https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Summary of Licenced Restaurants and Fast-Food Joints in the AMA as at 2024	66
2	Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism	67
3	Unit of Analysis, Instrument, Sample Size and Sampling Technique	76
4	Thematic Analysis Framework	87
5	Validity and Reliability Strategies for the Study	90

Digitized by Sam Jonah Library

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)	30
2	Conceptual Framework	36
3	Map of Accra Metropolis Showing the restaurants and fast food Studied	65
4	Research Methods Employed for the Study	71

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DFS	Digital Food Service
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GTA	Ghana Tourism Authority
IDI	In-depth Interview
IT	Information Technology
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
UCC	University of Cape Coast

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

In recent years, technological advancement has increasingly shaped everyday life, altering how individuals communicate, work, consume services, and organise social activities (Hanandini, 2024). Within the service sector, these changes have been particularly evident in the food service industry, where digital technologies have transformed traditional modes of service delivery (Garg, 2024). The rapid evolution of digital platforms has redefined how customers plan, access, and consume food services, while compelling food service providers to restructure their operational models and service architectures (Packin, 2018; Fichman, Santos, & Zheng, 2014). Rather than relying solely on face-to-face interactions, contemporary food service delivery is increasingly mediated through technology, enabling faster transactions, improved coordination, and enhanced responsiveness (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

Digital Food Services (DFS) represent a technology-mediated service model through which food ordering, payment, fulfilment, and delivery are coordinated via digital platforms (Shahzad, Zhang, & Ashfaq, 2023). DFS is not merely the presence of food delivery but involves the integration of mobile applications and web-based systems whether proprietary or third-party that allow customers to place orders remotely or on-premise, track fulfilment, and receive food for off-premise consumption (Zou, 2024). In contrast to traditional food services that relied heavily on physical presence, manual

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ordering, and in-person payment, DFS is characterised by platform mediation, operational transparency, and multi-actor coordination (Han-Shen et al., 2020). This shift marks a transition from purely on-site consumption to digitally mediated service ecosystems.

Digital Food Service (DFS) operates within a multi-stakeholder environment. In this context, stakeholders include customers who initiate and consume services, food service providers who prepare meals and manage operations, and delivery agents who act as intermediaries between providers and consumers (Hosseini, 2020). Platform operators further mediate interactions among these groups, influencing service efficiency, satisfaction, and continuity of use. The experiences of these stakeholders whether positive or negative play a critical role in shaping DFS sustainability, adoption, and long-term success (Mujeri & Azam, 2018).

Globally, DFS has matured in several markets and continues to expand, with the industry projected to grow annually and generate substantial revenues (McKinsey, 2016; Kubiak-Padkowska, 2025). This growth reflects increasing consumer demand for convenience, flexibility, and variety, which digital platforms are better positioned to deliver than traditional walk-in food service models (Arulmozhi, Eswaran, & Vinayagamoorthi, 2022). DFS also enables food providers to extend market reach, manage delivery logistics, and coordinate interactions across stakeholders through platform-based systems (Schreieck & Wiesche, 2017). Africa has become an active participant in this transformation, with DFS adoption expanding rapidly across the continent (Sanchez-Cartas & Leon, 2019). Ghana represents a notable example, where

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DFS growth has been supported by increasing access to digital technologies and evolving consumer lifestyles (Afranie-Adjei, 2024; Bowerman, 2014).

Ghana's internet penetration reached 53% by early 2022, indicating substantial digital connectivity, particularly within urban centres such as the Accra Metropolis (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This digital environment has facilitated the integration of DFS into food service operations, enabling restaurants and fast-food outlets in Accra to adopt mobile and web-based platforms for ordering, payment, and delivery. Platforms such as Yango, Glovo, Hubtel, Jumia, and Bolt have reshaped food access in the city, extending service reach beyond traditional dine-in consumption and incorporating digitally connected customers who may not have previously relied on physical restaurant visits.

Accra's food service landscape has long reflected changing urban consumption patterns. Historically dominated by chop bars and street food vendors offering traditional meals, the city experienced a major transformation with the emergence of fast-food establishments from the 1990s onward (Agyei-Mensah & Aikins, 2010). This evolution intensified with urbanisation, rising incomes, and busier lifestyles, reinforcing demand for convenience and speed in food consumption. DFS represents the latest phase in this trajectory, layering digital mediation onto an already diverse and hybrid foodscape.

The growth and reliance on DFS have been accelerated by several factors. The COVID-19 pandemic played a critical role by limiting physical interactions and accelerating reliance on remote food ordering and delivery systems. Additionally, youth and tech-savvy populations have fuelled DFS uptake through their familiarity with mobile technologies and preference for

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convenience-driven services. Beyond consumption, DFS has created opportunities for economic participation, particularly for young people engaged as delivery agents, while generating revenue streams for food service providers and platform operators.

Despite its benefits, DFS faces notable challenges. Stakeholder experiences significantly influence platform sustainability, customer retention, and service continuity (Mujeri & Azam, 2018). Constraints experienced within DFS can be technological (e.g., application failures), economic (e.g., delivery costs), or social (e.g., poor communication among stakeholders). Customers may encounter long waiting times, incorrect orders, or poor service quality (Rupp, 2018), while delivery agents face demanding work conditions, emotional stress, and logistical barriers (Huang, 2022; Liu & Friedman, 2021). Food service providers similarly contend with cancelled orders, delivery delays, and operational pressures that affect profitability and service quality (Opare-Ansah, 2024).

While several technology adoption theories explain digital usage broadly, they remain limited in capturing the lived experiences of multiple stakeholders within DFS ecosystems. Consequently, this study adopts the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as its guiding framework (Venkatesh et al., 2012), contextualised to the DFS environment. The theory explains how performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions shape behavioural intention and continued use. By linking observed stakeholder behaviours and experiences to this framework, the study provides a social-science explanation

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of DFS adoption, continuity, and constraints among customers, delivery agents, and food service providers in Accra.

Statement of the Problem

Digital Food Services (DFS) have gained increasing popularity as customers perceive them as more convenient and efficient than traditional food service arrangements that require physical presence and waiting time (Lin, Ortega, & Caputo, 2023). Beyond consumer convenience, DFS has expanded income opportunities for food service providers and delivery agents by enabling broader market access and flexible service delivery models (Lee, Lee, & Jeon, 2017; Chen, Liang, & Kuo, 2020). Consequently, DFS has become an integral component of contemporary hospitality operations, relying on coordinated interactions among multiple stakeholders to function effectively.

In Ghana, particularly within the Accra Metropolis, DFS operations depend heavily on timely communication and coordination between food service providers, delivery agents, and customers to ensure successful order fulfilment. However, the DFS process from order placement and preparation to delivery and consumption exposes stakeholders to varied experiences that may be positive or negative. These experiences significantly influence the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of DFS platforms (Dannenberg et al., 2020). Since service outcomes are shaped by users' lived experiences, understanding how different stakeholders perceive and interact with DFS systems is critical to improving service delivery (Cohen et al., 2021).

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Despite the growing relevance of DFS, existing literature reveals notable gaps. First, many studies examine DFS from a single-stakeholder perspective, thereby offering a fragmented understanding of the ecosystem. For example, Buncaras et al. (2022) focused on delivery riders' challenges, while studies by Ganapathi and Abu-Shanab (2020), Hussien and Mansour (2020), and Beliya et al. (2019) concentrated primarily on customer satisfaction. These studies provide valuable insights but overlook the interconnected experiences of food service providers and delivery agents, whose roles are central to DFS operations. As a result, there is limited empirical evidence that captures the collective and interdependent experiences of all key DFS stakeholders.

Second, the contextual focus of DFS research remains geographically skewed. Most empirical studies have been conducted in Western and Asian contexts, including Australia (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), China (Zou et al., 2022), Jordan (Mohammad et al., 2022), India (Pal et al., 2022), and Korea (Pillai et al., 2022). While these studies advance understanding of online food delivery systems, their findings may not adequately reflect the socio-economic, technological, and cultural dynamics of developing economies such as Ghana. Consequently, there is a contextual gap regarding how DFS operates and is experienced within the Ghanaian food service environment.

Although a limited number of studies have examined DFS in Ghana (Forgtah, 2021; Amoako, Doe, & Neequaye, 2021; Addo et al., 2021), these studies are largely quantitative or narrowly focused and do not sufficiently capture the experiences of the key DFS actors, customers, delivery agents, and food service providers. This highlights a methodological gap, underscoring the

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need for qualitative, people-centred inquiry capable of revealing deeper insights into stakeholder motivations, challenges, and continued usage behaviour within the DFS space.

From a theoretical standpoint, existing technology adoption models, particularly the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), have been widely applied to explain users' responses to digital systems (Ullah et al., 2021). However, TAM-based studies tend to emphasise initial adoption and provide limited explanation of convenience, effectiveness, challenges, and continued usage across multiple stakeholder groups within complex service ecosystems such as DFS. This theoretical limitation necessitates a broader framework capable of explaining sustained technology use and diverse stakeholder experiences.

Accordingly, this study is anchored in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to examine DFS in Accra from a multi-stakeholder perspective. By focusing on motivation (performance expectancy), effectiveness (effort expectancy), challenges, and user continuance, the study seeks to address the identified empirical, contextual, methodological, and theoretical gaps, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of DFS experiences in the Ghanaian food service industry.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to assess stakeholders' experiences with digital food services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana. The specific objectives of the study are to:

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1. Explore the underlying motivations driving the adoption of Digital Food Services (DFS) among various stakeholders in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.
2. Examine stakeholders' experiences with DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.
3. Assess the challenges experienced by stakeholders in the utilisation of DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.
4. Investigate the factors influencing stakeholders' continued use of DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.

Research Questions

1. Which factors motivate stakeholders to adopt DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana?
2. How do stakeholders experience DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana?
3. Which constraints do stakeholders face in using DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana?
4. Which factors influence stakeholders continued use of DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana?

Significance of the Study

Knowledge of stakeholders' experiences with digital food services would offer an empirical guide to the activities of food service providers and guide managers in their formulation and implementation of effective management strategies to improve digital food services and ignite success. The results of this research would contribute to the global concern of digital

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food services in the graded restaurant and fast-food joint sector; as the information provided may be used by regulatory agencies, such as the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA). This will help them enforce sustainable practices on digital food services to ensure that digital food service operators enjoy maximum benefits, which would, in turn, make the system sustainable.

The study would test theories and frameworks of digital food service such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh *et al*. (2012). In addition, the theories of convenience, effectiveness and user acceptance would be adopted in this research to broadly comprehend how stakeholders accept and use new technologies (Rad, Nilashi & Dahlan, 2018). Since these models have western underpinnings, their adoption in this study would contribute to the empirical literature by confirming, refuting, extending and/or developing new frameworks based on their suitability within the context of developing countries. Finally, this study would provide a cross-cultural perspective to the discourse of digital food services, which would form the basis of further research into the concept from the developing countries' perspectives.

Delimitation

The study would sample graded restaurants and fast-food joints from the Accra Metropolis of Ghana. Although there are a lot of non-graded restaurants and fast-food joints, these would be excluded from the study. This is to ensure that the study sample consists of entities or firms that are graded on some scale. The non-graded restaurants and fast-food joints may vary in size and it would be difficult to compare their activities with graded

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restaurants and fast-food joints. Their inclusion may render the results biased and limit the authenticity of the study findings. The remaining stakeholders (customers and delivery agents) sampled for this research would be customers who have ever used digital food services and delivery agents who operate independently in the Accra Metropolis of Ghana.

Definition of Terms

Stakeholders: are individuals, people or organisations who are involved in or affected by the conception and completion of digital food services (Hosseini et al., 2020).

Experience: is defined as the understanding or expertise that one has acquired in a certain occupation or action as a consequence of prolonged use (Meyer, 2017). Also, experience entails direct or indirect encounters with an organisation that shapes individuals or groups positively or negatively.

Stakeholders' experience: refers to the occurrences, knowledge and emotions that have shaped the lives of individuals, people or organisations who are involved in or affected by the conception and completion of digital food services in the past.

Customer experience: refers to the general perception that customers have of a particular brand during the purchasing process. Their impression of the brand and factors that affect the bottom line, such as revenue, are both impacted.

Restaurant experience: Customer expectations for a restaurant experience vary based on the restaurant type, but some common threads distinguish great restaurants from forgettable ones. These include excellent customer service,

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dependably exceptional food, an outstanding setting and kind, individualised service.

Delivery agents: The delivery agent or party is the intermediary that will move the food order from the restaurant to the exact pick-up point of the customer.

Digital food services (DFS): Allude to the way that technology and dining together can foster a new degree of interaction between customers and eateries. From fine-dining restaurants to fast casual franchises, these services are offered. However, they also have some commonality.

Digital food ordering: is described as an application that enables restaurant businesses to receive and handle online orders. It typically consists of two primary parts: s(a) an administration management interface designed to enable the restaurants to receive and handle the orders from customers and (b) a website or mobile app that lets customers view the restaurant's dishes and place an online order.

Digital food application: is described as software that enables food establishments to take and handle online orders. Usually, it is composed of two primary parts. The first is a website or mobile application that allows patrons to browse the restaurant's menu and place online orders. An administration management interface is the second, which allows restaurants to receive and handle orders.

Organisation of the Study

The thesis is organised into nine chapters. Chapter One focuses on the introduction, which involves the background, statement of the problem,

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research objectives; and questions. It also includes the significance of the study, the delimitations and the organisation of the study. Chapter Two presents a theoretical review that underpins the relationship among the variables. From the theoretical review, the conceptual framework for the study was developed. Chapter Three focuses on the empirical review of the relationships among the variables. It also talks about the strength and weaknesses of some of the measures employed in other studies and justification for limiting the study context to the graded restaurants and fast-food joints in the Accra Metropolis. Major lessons learnt from the empirical review are also discussed in this chapter.

The study's methodological framework is discussed in Chapter Four. It includes the research philosophy, research approach, research design, study area, target population, sample size and sampling procedure. It also covers instrument design, pre-testing, variable measures, data collecting and analysis methodologies, and ethical considerations. The fifth chapter examines the motivation of stakeholders in using digital food services, while the sixth chapter focuses on stakeholders' experiences with using digital food services. The seventh chapter, however, examines the challenges that stakeholders encounter when using digital food services, while the eighth chapter presents issues on the satisfaction and continued use of digital food services by stakeholders. In chapter nine, the summary, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

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Chapter Summary

The chapter opened with a brief introduction that described the subject under investigation, the study's significance, how it linked to earlier work, and the study's theoretical underpinnings. The research problem was stated in this chapter, and the gaps in the available literature were highlighted. Following that, the study's purpose was stated, and five objectives were established to steer the study's course. Research questions were developed in accordance with the given study objectives. The importance of the study was then discussed, followed by delimitations, definitions of key terms and the study's organisation.



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CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review that establishes a strong theoretical framework for the study. It begins by exploring key concepts that facilitate an understanding of the dynamics of DFS, highlighting theories and models relevant to stakeholder experiences. The chapter will then cover theories underpinning the study, including the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), and Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), and UTAUT. Finally, the chapter will introduce a conceptual framework and examine the importance of these concepts, theories and models in relation to the current study.

The Concept of Digital Food Services

Technological trends have evolved significantly in recent decades due to the rise of digitalisation and the increasing availability of user-friendly applications (Taneja, 2021). Digital platforms have not only altered organisational structures but have also reshaped everyday consumer behaviours, indicating that digitalisation operates simultaneously at institutional and individual levels (Legner et al., 2017). While Liu (2025) emphasise the functional use of digital systems for searching information, purchasing products, and communicating with service providers, their perspective reflects a more behaviour-driven interpretation of digitalisation compared to Legner et al.'s (2017) broader structural focus. This suggests that

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contemporary digital transformation is both a strategic organisational phenomenon and a consumer-centred behavioural shift.

In response to these evolving customer behaviours, organisations increasingly integrate digital platforms into their core business models (Constantinides, 2014). However, this integration extends beyond mere technological adoption. Archana et al. (2019) argue that the perceived service quality of digitalised products and services plays a critical role in fostering customer loyalty. When viewed together, these perspectives imply that digitalisation is effective only when it enhances customer experience alongside operational efficiency. As individuals place increasing value on time and convenience, digital applications become embedded in daily routines, reinforcing the expectation for seamless and reliable service delivery.

Within this broader digital environment, digital food services (DFS) have emerged as a significant innovation in the food service sector. Deepa and Selvamani (2018) identify digital applications as effective tools for facilitating timely food delivery, emphasising speed and accessibility. In contrast, Grewal et al. (2020) extend this understanding by highlighting convenience, reduced effort, and time efficiency as central motivations for customer adoption. Chin et al. (2020) further argue that DFS has taken a transformative position within the food service market, indicating a shift from traditional in-store dining to digitally mediated consumption. These differing emphases reveal that DFS has evolved from a purely functional service into a consumption model that aligns with modern lifestyles.

The growing reliance on digital food platforms is further supported by Dehghani et al. (2022), who observe that customers increasingly prefer

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ordering food through digitalised systems. This growing preference reflects a normalisation of DFS usage, suggesting that digital food ordering is no longer situational but increasingly habitual. Consequently, customer expectations extend beyond delivery speed to include reliability, service quality, and overall experience.

Conceptualisations of DFS in the literature also reflect varying emphases. Alesiuniene et al. (2021) define digital food service primarily as a logistics-driven process supported by digital applications, focusing on the operational aspect of food delivery. Conversely, Enz and Verma (2015) conceptualise DFS as an enhanced level of interaction between customers and food service providers, positioning technology as an interface that shapes dining experiences across different service formats. This contrast indicates that DFS encompasses both operational efficiency and experiential engagement.

Similarly, Sjahroeddin (2018) highlights technology-enabled ordering as a mechanism that deepens customer engagement, while Han-Shen et al. (2020) describe DFS as a service delivery practice facilitated through digital devices. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that DFS reconfigures both service delivery processes and customer–provider interactions, reinforcing its multidimensional nature.

In this study, digital food service is therefore understood as a digitally mediated process through which individuals order food from restaurants using online platforms and receive it through delivery agents for immediate or later consumption, reflecting the integration of technological functionality, service quality, convenience, and customer engagement.

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The Concept of Stakeholders

Stakeholder theory offers an appropriate lens for examining digital food services (DFS) because the system is inherently multi-actor and technologically mediated. Freeman's (1984) broad conceptualisation of a stakeholder as any individual or group that can affect or be affected by an organisation's objectives is useful in capturing the complexity of DFS ecosystems, where customers, delivery agents, and food service providers are all intertwined. However, the breadth of this definition makes it analytically limited, as it does not differentiate the nature or intensity of influence different actors exert within the service process.

Donaldson and Preston (1995) extend this understanding by arguing that organisational outcomes should account for the interests and returns of all stakeholders rather than privileging owners alone. While this normative position strengthens the ethical basis of stakeholder engagement, it assumes an alignment of stakeholder interests that is rarely present in practice, particularly in DFS contexts where efficiency demands, labour conditions, and customer expectations often conflict. This limitation suggests the need for a more context-sensitive application of stakeholder theory when analysing digitally enabled service systems.

Bryson's (2004) emphasis on stakeholder power introduces a more strategic dimension by identifying stakeholders as those capable of influencing an organisation's future. In DFS, this perspective highlights the influence of customers through ratings and reviews and of service providers through platform participation. However, focusing primarily on power risks overlooking delivery agents, who may lack strategic influence yet play a

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central operational role in service execution and customer experience. This reveals a tension between influence-based and operation-based stakeholder relevance in DFS.

Clarkson's (1995) definition, which frames stakeholders as individuals or groups with ownership, rights, or claims in an organisation's activities, offers greater structural clarity. His distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders is particularly instructive, as it identifies customers, employees, and regulators as critical to organisational survival. Nevertheless, the relative stability implied in this classification is challenged in digital service environments, where stakeholder roles are fluid and mediated by platform technologies. For instance, delivery agents may simultaneously function as employees, contractors, and service representatives, complicating traditional stakeholder boundaries.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that no single stakeholder definition fully captures the dynamics of DFS. The DFS process relies on the continuous interaction of food service providers, delivery agents, and customers, whose roles and experiences are mutually reinforcing rather than hierarchically fixed. In this study, these groups are therefore treated as central stakeholders, not merely because of formal power or ownership, but due to their direct involvement in value creation, service delivery, and consumption. This integrated view recognises that the overall success of DFS is shaped by how effectively the platform aligns the expectations, capabilities, and experiences of all participating stakeholders.

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Motivation for Using DFS

Motivation is a core concept in behavioural and organisational studies and refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain behaviour toward particular goals (Miner, 2015). Classical perspectives distinguish between intrinsic motivation, driven by internal satisfaction or personal interest, and extrinsic motivation, which is shaped by external rewards, constraints, or expected outcomes (Locke, & Schattke, 2019). While these distinctions are useful, they have been criticised for treating motivation as an individual-level phenomenon, often overlooking the contextual, technological, and relational conditions within which behaviour occurs (Usmani, 2019). Contemporary scholarship therefore recognises motivation as dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by perceived usefulness, effort, social influence, and anticipated benefits within specific environments, particularly in digitally mediated service settings.

When applied to digital food services (DFS), this conceptual understanding of motivation reveals variations across stakeholder groups rather than a single, uniform driver. Customers are motivated by both instrumental and symbolic factors, including perceived ease of use, time efficiency, privacy considerations, and the social status associated with advanced delivery platforms (Cho & Sagynov, 2015). These motivations reflect broader technology adoption dynamics, where individuals engage with digital systems when perceived benefits outweigh effort and perceived risk. However, such motivations are conditioned by access to digital resources and trust in technology, suggesting that motivation is influenced not only by individual preference but also by structural and socio-economic factors.

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For service providers and delivery agents, motivation is shaped by organisational and labour-related considerations. Service providers adopt DFS platforms to expand market reach, improve operational efficiency, and remain competitive in increasingly digitalised markets (Lee, Lee & Jeon, 2017). Delivery agents, on the other hand, are primarily motivated by employment opportunities, flexible payment structures, and ease of access to delivery platforms (Musyaffi et al., 2023). While these motivations highlight the perceived advantages of DFS participation, they also point to underlying tensions, such as income instability and unequal access to digital infrastructure. This underscores the need to view motivation within DFS as a multidimensional and stakeholder-dependent construct, shaped by both perceived benefits and systemic constraints.

The Concept of Stakeholders' Experience

The concept of experience in service research extends beyond a single interaction or outcome and is widely recognised as a multidimensional and subjective phenomenon. Bascur and Rusu (2020) define experience as an individual's internalised and subjective response to any interaction with a business, whether direct or indirect. Direct interactions occur during purchase, usage, and service encounters and are typically initiated by the customer, whereas indirect interactions arise from exposure to reviews, advertisements, word-of-mouth, or media representations of a service. This distinction underscores that experience is not confined to the moment of transaction but develops cumulatively across multiple touchpoints.

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In a similar vein, Verhoef et al. (2009) conceptualise experience as the holistic impression individuals form about a brand throughout all stages of their engagement in the purchase journey. This perspective broadens the understanding of experience from isolated service encounters to a longitudinal process shaped by emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses over time. Van Doorn et al. (2017) further argue that experience emerges from the totality of interactions between a business and its customers across the duration of their relationship, incorporating elements such as expectations, learning, engagement, and evaluation at each point of contact.

While these conceptualisations provide a strong foundation, they primarily foreground the customer perspective. In digitally mediated service systems such as digital food services (DFS), experience is not limited to customers alone but is co-created through the interactions of multiple stakeholders, including delivery agents and food service providers. The digital environment intensifies this interdependence, as technology mediates communication, coordination, and performance across all actors involved. DiPietro and Wang (2010) highlight that in the hospitality industry, stakeholder experiences within digital food services significantly influence service success, indicating that experience should be examined as a shared and interconnected phenomenon rather than a single-user outcome.

Accordingly, experience within DFS encompasses emotional responses (such as satisfaction, trust, or frustration), cognitive evaluations (such as perceptions of usefulness, reliability, and efficiency), behavioural responses (such as repeat usage or avoidance), social interactions (such as communication between customers, delivery agents, and providers), and

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sensory or interface-related encounters with the digital platform itself. This multidimensional view aligns with service experience research, which recognises experience as a dynamic construct shaped by technology, human interaction, and contextual factors across the service journey.

For the purpose of this study, experience is operationalised as the cumulative emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and interactional responses of stakeholders throughout the online food purchasing and delivery process. Digital food service platforms enable ordering, payment selection, tracking, communication, and delivery monitoring, all of which contribute to how stakeholders perceive and evaluate the service encounter (Li, Mirosa & Bremer, 2020). The involvement and interaction of these stakeholders across the purchase journey collectively constitute their DFS experience.

These experiences directly affect the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the DFS process. Hsu and Chen (2018) argue that user experience is shaped by both ease of use and perceived usefulness, influencing how individuals interact with digital systems. However, in a multi-stakeholder context such as DFS, system usability must simultaneously support customer satisfaction, delivery efficiency, and operational feasibility for service providers. The study conceptualized experience as convenience, effectiveness and challenges.

Convenience

Convenience represents a key experiential dimension within digital food services. Yoon and Kim (2007) define convenience as the degree of time, place, and execution expediency encountered when using a digital platform to

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complete a task. Sheth (2020) associates' convenience with time flexibility, whereby users perceive greater convenience when tasks can be completed at any time. Place convenience refers to the comfort derived from completing a task irrespective of physical location (Ngoc Thuy, 2011), while execution convenience reflects the ease and comfort experienced during system use. In the DFS context, convenience therefore emerges from the platform's ability to minimise effort, reduce waiting time, and enable seamless interactions for all stakeholders involved.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which a digital system successfully facilitates intended outcomes for its users. Liang and Xue (2009) describe effectiveness as the perceived likelihood that a technology will exert a meaningful influence on task performance. When users encounter difficulty in understanding or using a system, its capacity to deliver value is diminished. In the context of DFS, effectiveness can be assessed through order accuracy, delivery speed, system reliability, communication efficiency, and overall stakeholder satisfaction (Laurillard, as cited in Lowerison et al., 2006).

Szwejczewski et al. (2015) emphasise that effectiveness is contingent upon active system use by customers, delivery agents, and service providers, as engagement enhances understanding and operational efficiency. Empirical evidence from Eom (2012) further demonstrates that user satisfaction is a significant predictor of system efficiency, reinforcing the link between experience and effectiveness. Atkinson and Lim (2013) similarly argue that continued usage of digital systems is largely determined by perceived

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effectiveness. Thus, stakeholders' evaluations of DFS effectiveness are likely to influence both adoption and continuance behaviour.

Customers' experiences within DFS are also shaped by communication quality, performance expectancy, and service quality. Effective communication regarding order status and delivery timelines enhances trust and satisfaction (Kim, 2025). Performance expectancy, particularly in relation to timely and accurate deliveries, significantly influences customer perceptions and loyalty (Halil & Ahmad, F2025). Furthermore, understanding customer preferences enables service providers to personalise offerings, improving perceived service quality (Ahrholdt, Gudergan & Ringle, 2017). Nonetheless, Siddiqui and Sharma (2010) caution that customers differ in their priorities, with some valuing price or variety over service quality, underscoring the need for adaptive and stakeholder-sensitive service strategies.

Challenges

Digital food service constraints refer to the challenges and limitations associated with the adoption and operation of digital technologies within the food service sector (Verdouw et al., 2016). As the industry increasingly relies on digital platforms, automated processes, and mobile applications, issues such as data security, technological infrastructure, user adaptation, system integration, communication breakdowns, and disruptions to traditional service relationships become more pronounced (Carcary et al., 2018; Buhalis et al., 2019).

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Recognising and addressing these constraints is essential for ensuring a seamless and positive experience for all stakeholders involved. Lei, Wang and Law (2019) argue that organisations must balance technological advancement with service quality to sustain customer trust and operational efficiency. Inthong et al. (2022) further note that examining DFS constraints requires a holistic understanding of how technological, organisational, and human factors interact within the dynamic food service environment.

Concept of Continued Usage

According to Yoon and Rolland (2015), continued usage, in the information technology context, alludes to the long-term, consistent use of a technology by individual users following their very first acceptability. Agreeing to Yoon and Rolland, Bhattacherjee, Perols, and Sanford (2008) also defined continuance usage as intention of an individual to maintain the usage of an information system. The study, therefore, conceptualised continued usage as the decision of the user to continue using specific digital food service technologies.

In a study conducted in the food and beverage industry, Silva, Dias and Rodrigues (2022) found that while self-efficacy, technological readiness, degree of severity and sensitivity have an indirect influence on users' intention to keep using food delivery apps, usefulness and convenience have a direct impact. Foroughi, Iranmanesh, and Hyun (2019) also investigated the factors influencing the continued usage intention of m-banking services in Malaysia.

The study revealed that the factors that influenced attitude were perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and satisfaction. The attitude of

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individuals was influenced when they perceived that the m-banking technology service affords them satisfaction because of its ease of use; and usefulness. Similarly, according to the Technological Continuance Theory (TCT), perceived usefulness, satisfaction and attitude are the predictors of continuance intention. Satisfaction is influenced by confirmation and perceived usefulness. Satisfaction is a good emotional state brought on by an overall assessment of performance based on prior purchase and consumption experiences (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). For the purpose of this study, effectiveness, user constraints and convenience were considered as constructs that define and propel one's determination to keep using a DFS system.

The continual usage of DFS is driven by several main influences that enhance customer experience and satisfaction, including convenience, efficiency, variety of service providers, visibility, increased sales, convenient delivery agents, employment opportunities; and flexibility. Convenience is a crucial aspect, as DFS platforms provide easy access to services anytime and anywhere, supported by Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) that eliminate physical constraints (Galdolage, 2021). Efficiency is another critical factor, with the speed and reliability of transactions contributing to customer satisfaction and productivity, as customers often act as co-producers in the service process (Anitsal & Schumann, 2007; Galdolage, 2021). A variety of service providers enhances customer experience by offering multiple options to suit individual needs (Wilder, Collier, & Barnes 2014). Additionally, increased visibility of services through digital platforms boosts customer engagement and sales, while convenient delivery agents improve service accessibility and create employment opportunities, contributing to economic

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growth (Reinartz, Wiegand, & Imschloss 2019). Flexibility in service offerings further enhances customer loyalty by allowing users to tailor services to their specific needs (Walsh & Godfrey, 2000). However, Ngware, (2024) argued that despite these advantages, challenges such as the digital divide may limit access for certain demographics, emphasising the need for inclusive strategies to ensure equitable benefits from DFS.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

This section discusses the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), and Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), with the intention of providing a theoretical justification for experiences of digital food service. This study's conceptual framework was influenced by these theories and model.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The UTAUT proposed by Venkatesh *et al*. (2003) served as the underpinning theory for this study in an attempt to explain stakeholders experience with digital food service. According to Venkatesh *et al*. (2003), UTAUT asserts that users' intention to act or behave is directly influenced by performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence; and enabling conditions. Furthermore, moderating variables were taken into consideration to influence the relationships such as age, experience and gender.

The four constructs of UTAUT include performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions that influence behavioural intention to use a technology (Venkatesh *et al*., 2003). However,

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for the purpose of this study, performance expectancy and effort expectancy were viewed in the light of stakeholders' experience (effectiveness and convenience) in the use of digital food service.

A key element of UTAUT is performance expectancy (UTC-1), which characterises a person's conviction that technology may enhance performance of work (Venkatesh et al., 2003). When applied to digital food service stakeholders, that is, customers, restaurant employees and management, this means assessing the platform's effectiveness in the light of factors like order accuracy, delivery speed, menu customisation options and overall customer satisfaction. Conversely, the notion of effort expectancy (UT-C2), which is essential to UTAUT, captures the simplicity of technological usage (Venkatesh *et al*., 2003). It represents the convenience and ease of use that people associate with technology. Among the stakeholders' involvement in the digital food service, effort expectancy takes the method of concerns about the platform's usability, order placement, payment procedures and problem-solving. For stakeholders interacting with digital food services, a platform that is thought to be more practical and user-friendly has the potential to improve the whole experience.

Another key construct in the UTAUT is social influence (UT-C3), which reflects the extent to which the individual believes that important others think that they should use the technology. Finally, facilitating conditions (UT-C4) describe the perceived level of available professional and technical support in using the technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the context of this study, performance expectancy (effectiveness) and effort expectancy (convenience) were considered as constructs from the UTAUT as experiences

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of stakeholders (delivery agents, customers and food service providers) in a digital food service process. Besides these determining constructs or experiences, gender and age may act as moderators in using technology (Venkatesh *et al*., 2012).

The UTAUT has contributed to the body of literature in diverse ways as indicated by scholars (Dwivedi, Rana, Chen, & Williams, 2011; Williams, Rana, & Dwivedi 2015). Rodrigues, Sarabdeen, and Balasubramanian (2016) discovered that with an adjusted R2 of 69%, UTAUT performs better than eight separate models related to technology acceptance and usage.

Similarly, Kiwanuka (2015) contends that since the launch of the UTAUT, the theory has been widely used as a theoretical lens by researchers studying user intention and behaviour in empirical studies related to technology adoption and diffusion. The original paper by Venkatesh *et al*. (2003) has been cited just under 5,000 times within the first four years (Dwivedi, Dwivedi, Rana, Jeyaraj, Clement, & Williams, 2019) and it discusses the UTAUT in relation to a variety of technologies such as websites, mobile technology, tax payment systems, hospital information systems and the internet (Barrane, Karuranga, & Poulin, 2018).

Despite the contribution of the UTAUT to the literature and the field of technology, Venkatesh *et al.* (2016) specifically emphasised the need to investigate additional contextual impacts in the review of UTAUT research. Considering the numerous UTAUT extensions that have been put forth in the literature, some studies (Tamilmani, Rana, Wamba, & Dwivedi, 2021; Vinnik, 2017) call for the addition of fresh moderating mechanisms. The majority of these extensions continue to make reference to variations in how users use

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technology, including technological readiness (Borrero et al., 2014), adopters versus non-adopters (Eckhardt et al., 2009), and employment, income, education, marital status, ethnicity, religion and language (Liew, Vaithilingam, & Nair, 2014).

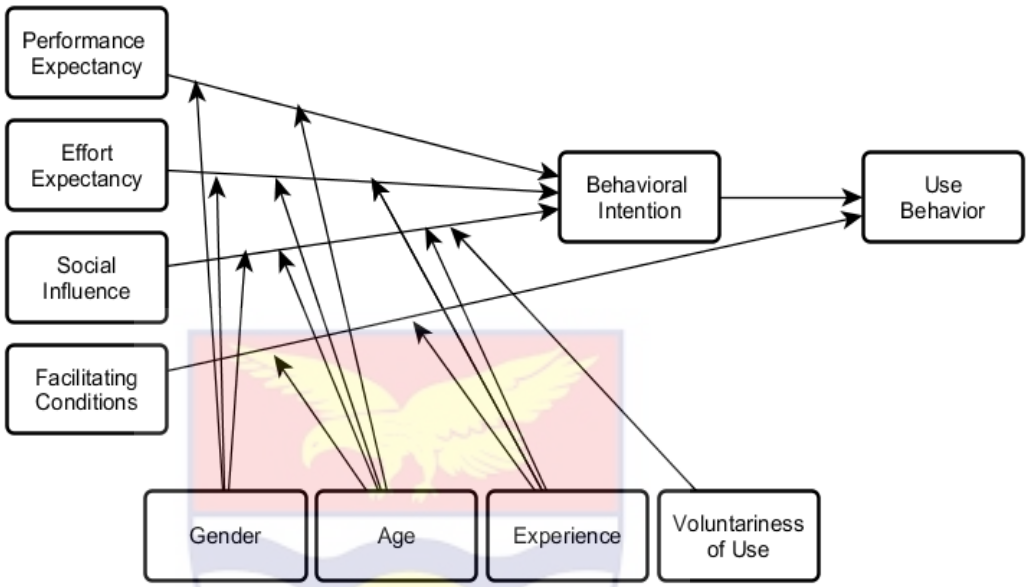


Figure 1: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

Source: Venkatesh et al. (2003).

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) framework

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) framework, propounded by Vargo and Lusch (2004), provides a robust theoretical lens for analysing digital food services (DFS) because it reconceptualises value creation as a collaborative and relational process rather than a firm-controlled output. Vargo and Lusch (2004) challenge the traditional goods-dominant logic by arguing that service—not goods—is the fundamental basis of exchange, and that value is co-created through interactions among multiple actors within a service ecosystem. This perspective is particularly relevant to DFS, where food service providers, delivery agents, customers, and digital platforms jointly

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participate in producing service outcomes. In this context, value does not reside solely in the food product or delivery mechanism but emerges through stakeholders' experiences of ordering, communication, delivery, and consumption (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Applying SDL to DFS foregrounds the role of stakeholders as active value co-creators rather than passive recipients of services. Customers integrate operant resources such as preferences, time, trust, and feedback when interacting with DFS platforms, while delivery agents contribute labour, skills, and local knowledge to execute last-mile delivery. Food service providers, on the other hand, integrate culinary expertise, preparation efficiency, and service consistency into the system. Digital platforms coordinate these interactions by enabling information exchange, payment processing, and real-time tracking (Yadav, & Pavlou, 2020). From an SDL perspective, the effectiveness of DFS therefore depends on how well these actors integrate their resources to co-create value-in-use, rather than on the elimination of isolated operational bottlenecks (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Consequently, service failures such as delivery delays, inaccurate orders, or system breakdowns are understood as disruptions in resource integration and stakeholder interaction rather than merely technical inefficiencies.

Moreover, SDL offers a useful framework for understanding motivation and experience within DFS. Stakeholders' motivation to participate in DFS is shaped by their anticipated value from engagement, whether in the form of convenience and satisfaction for customers, operational efficiency and market expansion for service providers, or income and flexibility for delivery agents (Schoenfield et al., 2014). These motivations influence how

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stakeholders engage in the service ecosystem and, by extension, the quality of value co-creation. Experiences within DFS are therefore multidimensional and emergent, shaped by emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and interactional responses across multiple touchpoints (Verhoef et al., 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). By adopting SDL as the guiding theoretical framework, this study positions DFS as a dynamic service ecosystem in which stakeholder interactions, motivations, and experiences collectively determine service effectiveness and sustainability.

Expectancy-Disconfirmation and Expectancy-Confirmation Theories

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), propounded by Oliver (1977, 1980), provides a foundational framework for understanding customer satisfaction and experience in service interactions. The theory posits that customers form expectations prior to a service encounter, and their subsequent evaluation of service performance generates a confirmation or disconfirmation of these expectations (Oliver, 1980). Positive disconfirmation occurs when perceived performance exceeds expectations, leading to satisfaction, while negative disconfirmation arises when performance falls short, resulting in dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980). This mechanism emphasises the cognitive comparison between anticipated and actual service outcomes, highlighting the centrality of expectation management in shaping customer experience (Oliver, 1977). While EDT has been widely applied to traditional service contexts, it has also been extended to digital and platform-based services, demonstrating robust explanatory power in predicting user satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

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Expectancy-Confirmation Theory (ECT), which builds on EDT, elaborates the cognitive processes through which expectations are confirmed over time (Bhattacherjee, 2001). ECT suggests that continued use of a service depends on the alignment between initial expectations and perceived performance: if experiences confirm expectations, users are likely to continue engagement; if not, discontinuance or negative evaluations may occur. The theory is particularly relevant for technology-mediated services, where users' perceptions of ease of use, usefulness, and reliability shape their ongoing engagement (Bhattacherjee, 2001). Importantly, ECT provides a temporal dimension to experience evaluation, capturing the dynamic feedback loop between expectations, performance perception, satisfaction, and continuance intention (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Oliver, 1980).

In the context of Digital Food Services (DFS), EDT and ECT provide a robust framework for measuring and interpreting stakeholder experiences. Customers enter the DFS process with specific expectations regarding delivery speed, order accuracy, ease of use of digital platforms, and service quality. The disconfirmation of these expectations—through timely or delayed deliveries, accurate or incorrect orders, or user-friendly or confusing app interfaces directly influences satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat usage (Oliver, 1980).

Similarly, delivery agents and food service providers develop performance expectations concerning workload, compensation, and operational efficiency; the alignment or misalignment of these expectations with actual experience shapes motivation, engagement, and perceived effectiveness within the DFS ecosystem. By applying EDT and ECT, this

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study acknowledges that experience is not a static outcome but an evaluative process arising from stakeholders' comparisons between anticipated and actual service encounters, thus providing a theoretically sound basis for operationalising constructs like convenience, effectiveness, and satisfaction in DFS.

Despite their explanatory strengths, EDT and ECT are not without critique. Some scholars argue that these theories overly prioritise cognitive evaluation while underplaying emotional, social, and behavioural dimensions of experience, which can be particularly salient in multi-actor service ecosystems like DFS (Van Ryzin, 2013; Ray, & Rahman, 2016; Schiebler et al. 2025). Others note that expectations themselves are influenced by prior experience, social influence, and platform design, creating potential endogeneity issues if not carefully controlled in empirical measurement (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

Nonetheless, the theories have been widely used in e-commerce, online banking, mobile applications, and food delivery studies to link expectation management, perceived performance, and continuance intention (Li, Mirosa & Bremer, 2020; Cho & Sagynov, 2015), making them directly applicable for this study. By integrating EDT and ECT with constructs derived from UTAUT, this study ensures that measures of DFS experience, satisfaction, and continuance intention are grounded in well-established theoretical principles, while capturing both cognitive assessment and behavioural outcomes of stakeholder interactions.

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Conceptual Framework for the Study

A conceptual framework was developed for this study based on the theories and models that inform stakeholder behaviour, experience, and technology use in digital food services (DFS), along with the variables they propose. Drawing on the perspectives of multiple authors provided a theoretically grounded and practical approach to addressing the study problem (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Bhattacherjee, 2001; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Therefore, the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1977, 1980), Expectancy-Confirmation Logic (Bhattacherjee, 2001), and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003) collectively provided the conceptual guidance for this study. These frameworks offer complementary insights: EDT and Expectancy-Confirmation Logic explain how stakeholders' expectations, perceived performance, and satisfaction shape their experiences and continued engagement, while UTAUT provides a robust model for understanding technology adoption and usage behaviour within DFS platforms.

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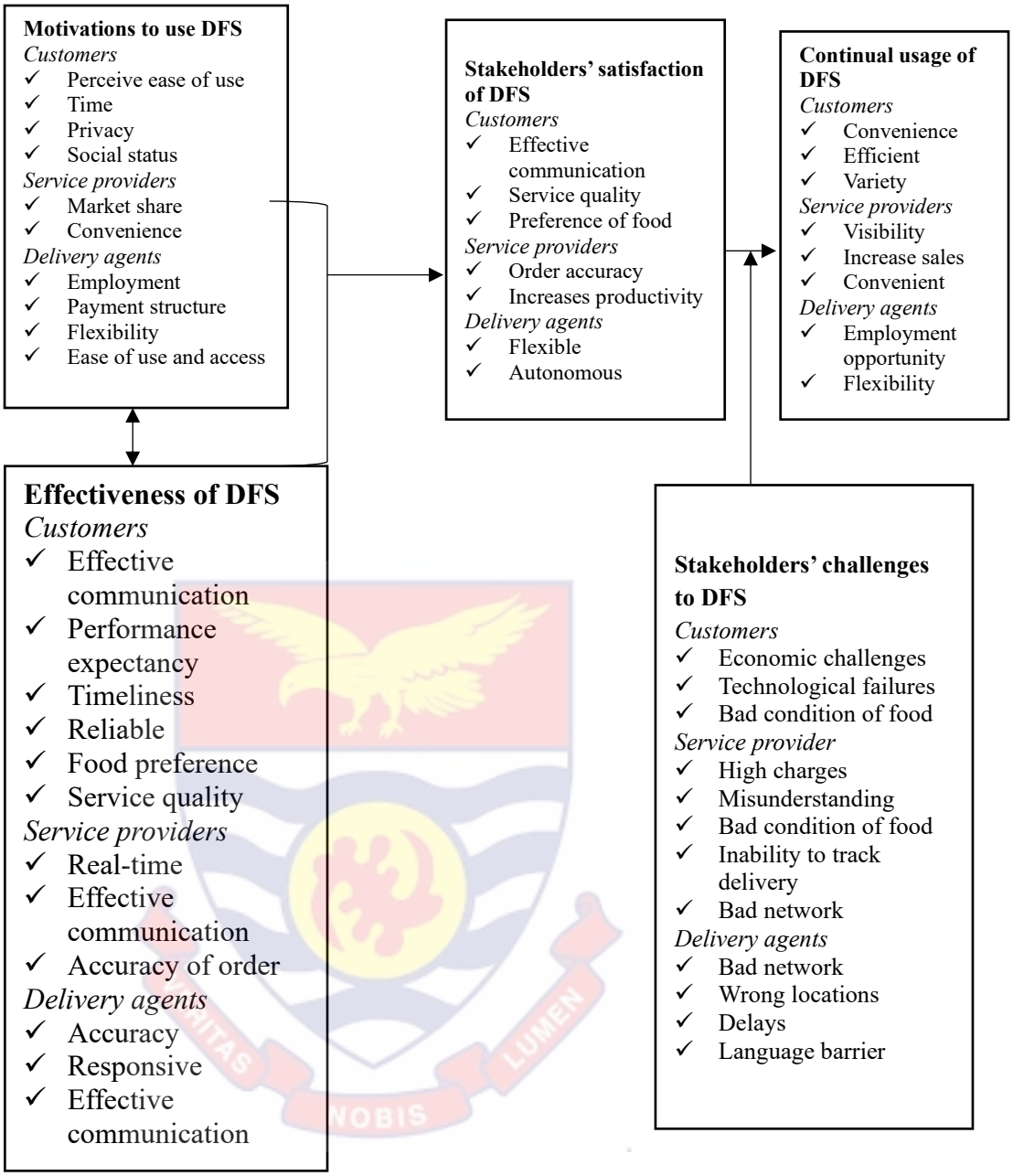


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework
Source: Author's Construct, (2024)

The framework outlines the experiences of stakeholders, including customers, delivery agents and food service providers, within the digital food service process. For the purpose of this study, stakeholder experiences were categorised into three main aspects: convenience, effectiveness and constraints. These experiences are believed to play a crucial role in shaping stakeholders' ongoing utilisation of the technological system (Bhattacherjee,

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2001) employed in the digital food service process. As illustrated in the framework, stakeholders' convenience is assessed through the UTAUT lens, particularly the construct of effort expectancy as proposed by Venkatesh *et al*. (2003). This aspect examines how users perceive the simplicity of use of the technology, reflecting the convenience and user-friendliness individuals attribute to the technology. This perception significantly influences stakeholders' continuous engagement with the DFS system (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

Furthermore, stakeholders' experience in terms of the effectiveness of DFS aligns with the UTAUT concept of performance expectancy (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). In this context, effectiveness measures the degree to which an individual believes that using the technology would enhance their overall productivity or performance at work. This variable directly influences stakeholders' ongoing usage of DFS, as indicated in the provided framework. The constraints in the DFS process fall within various categories to shape the overall experience of stakeholders (Gupta & Boyd, 2008). It is acknowledged that stakeholders' decisions and implementation regarding the continued usage of digital food service applications are notably influenced by these experiences. The entire process, as depicted in the framework, informs stakeholders' appreciation of the digital food service, ultimately influencing their decision to continue using the system or not.

Chapter Summary

The chapter has presented the theoretical foundations of the study as well as the concepts employed in the study. Firstly, the various theories

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underpinning the study included UTAUT which proposes the role of technology acceptance in digital food service for users to experience convenience and effectiveness of the process. The chapter has further addressed the continuance usage of digital food service by these stakeholders, considering their experiences through the extended model of information technology continuance. Finally, the theory of constrains was indorsed in the study. The theory suggests that these constraints are experiences that stakeholder encountered, that also determines the continued usage of DFS. It was argued that these constraints should be identified and managed for the success and management of DFS.

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CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents empirical studies carried out on the various experiences related to online purchases, particularly that of DFS. The review aims to identify trends and experiences in the present discourse on stakeholders (customers, delivery agents; and food providers) with DFS. The chapter focuses on the following domains: motivations driving the adoption of DFS among stakeholders, stakeholders' perceived effectiveness with the use of DFS, stakeholders' constraint with the use of DFS, stakeholders' satisfaction with the use of DFS and finally factors influencing the continued use of DFS among stakeholders.

Motivations Driving the Adoption of DFS Among Various Stakeholders

The rising prominence DFS has attracted substantial scholarly attention across diverse contexts. Studies (Alnasser & Abaalkhail, 2024; Forgtah, 2021; Rebollo & Hinlayagan, 2023) have explored user motivations, behavioural patterns, technological influences and the managerial dynamics shaping the DFS sector. Alnasser and Abaalkhail (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine food delivery app (FDA) usage behaviours, motivations and perceptions among Saudis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings indicated that convenience and time-saving were primary drivers for FDA adoption, with 71.9% of respondents using FDAs weekly. Cultural traditions and nutritional awareness also influenced user behaviour, highlighting the dual

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impact of modern convenience and deep-rooted societal customs. This study underscored the complexity of digital food behaviours within a unique socio-cultural and health-related environment (COVID-19 and obesity) (Alnasser & Abaalkhail, 2024).

Similarly, Forgtah (2021) explored the motivations behind digital food delivery service (DFDS) usage among university students at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The study revealed that convenience, lifestyle habits and social influence predominantly motivated students to use DFDS, with about 80% indicating intentions to reuse the services. However, barriers such as value and usage obstacles were identified, suggesting that while digital platforms are increasingly attractive, certain friction points persist. These findings echo the critical role of user experience optimisation and targeted marketing approaches in enhancing DFDS uptake (Forgtah, 2021).

In another study, Shahzad, Zhang, and Ashfaq (2023) shifted focus to drone food delivery (DFD) services, applying behavioural reasoning theory to understand adoption behaviours. They found that environmental effectiveness influenced both supportive and opposing reasons for DFD adoption. Perceived benefits promoted intention to use, while concerns (such as tradition barriers) discouraged adoption. It was observed that personal inventiveness moderated these associations. Their study highlighted the worth of addressing customer concerns through awareness programmes to enhance acceptance of emerging delivery technologies.

Addressing the Gen Z demographic, Rebollo and Hinlayagan (2023) examined customer satisfaction in online food delivery services. They identified that e-service quality and convenience motivations were pivotal to

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user satisfaction. Factors such as privacy and security, information quality, and navigation design emerged as vital considerations. Their findings pointed to the necessity of ensuring technical robustness and user-centric service design to meet the evolving demands of Generation Z customers (Rebollo & Hinlayagan, 2023).

Mathew, Jha, Lingappa, & Sinha (2021) added another technological dimension by investigating chatbots' interaction styles in the online food delivery space. Through an experimental design, they found that social-oriented chatbot interactions enhanced users' perception of social presence and enjoyment. However, trust and behavioural intention were not directly influenced. Their findings suggested that while chatbot designs can enhance affective experiences, building long-term trust requires additional strategies beyond conversational style.

Finally, from a strategic and managerial lens, Bivona (2023) employed a Dynamic Performance Management (DPM) perspective to examine performance drivers in online food delivery platforms. The study revealed that while network effects are beneficial, they are insufficient alone for platform sustainability. Instead, factors such as platform attractiveness, critical mass and systemic performance management strategies are crucial. The DPM framework presented by Bivona offers a dynamic, systems-based approach for assessing and guiding the growth of food delivery platforms in volatile digital environments.

Collectively, these empirical studies demonstrate that the adoption and success of digital food services are multifaceted, influenced by convenience, lifestyle, cultural factors, technological innovation, perceived risks and

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systemic management approaches. Future efforts in enhancing DFDS adoption and performance should balance user-centric service enhancements, cultural sensitivity, technological trust-building and strategic platform management to thrive in the dynamic and competitive food delivery sector.

Stakeholders' Experiences with Digital Food Service

Studies have examined the effectiveness of digital applications for online transactions (Hew, Lee, Ooi, & Wei 2015; Mehra, Paul, & Kaurav, 2021; Vahdat, Alizadeh, Quach, & Hamelin 2021). The desired criteria for measuring the efficacy or success of an online application are established when users find no difficulty in using such technology and understand how it functions, as perceived by these stakeholders (customers, delivery agents and food service providers).

Customers' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service

The effectiveness of digital food services has garnered considerable attention in recent years, especially as customer preferences shift towards convenience and digital engagement. Several empirical studies have examined how customers perceive the effectiveness and value of these services, focusing on motivational factors, customer attitudes and behavioural intentions. Al Maalouf *et al.* (2025) conducted a comprehensive study exploring customers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward food ordering via online platforms in Lebanon. Using regression analysis on data from 280 respondents, they identified that e-service quality, personal aspects, perceived food quality, trust,

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time-saving orientation and convenience motivation significantly influenced customer attitudes.

Crucially, their findings revealed that attitudes toward online food delivery acted as a pivotal mediator between these motivational factors and customers' intention to order food online. This suggests that while convenience and trust drive positive perceptions, it is the overall attitude developed towards the service that ultimately determines usage. Their study is notable for integrating multiple consumer motivations within Lebanon's unique socio-economic context, offering a holistic framework for understanding consumer behaviour in online food delivery.

In their literature review, Frederick and Bhat (2021) synthesised the findings on customer perception towards online food delivery services, revealing the industry's nascent nature and the need for further empirical explorations. Their review highlighted that factor such as service quality, convenience, cost effectiveness and delivery speed influence customer perceptions significantly. However, they identified a gap in the existing literature regarding how these factors interrelate to shape overall customer perception, suggesting the need for models that integrate these variables cohesively to explain customer behaviour.

Furthermore, Frederick and Bhat (2022) developed a conceptual model to understand the factors shaping customer perception of online food delivery services. Perceived benefits, past experience, subjective norms and system quality were among the factors their research found to be significant in shaping consumers' opinions about these services. By combining insights from existing theories and focus group discussions, their model suggests that

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customer perception is multi-dimensional, shaped by both intrinsic motivations (e.g., perceived benefits) and extrinsic influences (e.g., subjective norms). A theoretical basis for further empirical validation is provided by this model.

In the Indian context, Panse *et al*. (2019) examined customer behaviour towards online food delivery platforms using quantitative methods. Control, credibility, convenience, ease of information, technology anxiety, desire for connection and enjoyment were the seven independent factors that were identified in their study. These significantly influenced customer satisfaction and intentions to use online food delivery apps. Using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis, they found that convenience and credibility were the strongest drivers of customer satisfaction, suggesting that the perceived effectiveness of digital food services is largely dependent on how seamlessly these platforms integrate ease of use and reliability in service delivery.

Collectively, these empirical studies underscore that the effectiveness of digital food services as perceived by customers is multi-faceted, driven by service quality dimensions such as speed, reliability and food quality; motivational factors including time-saving, convenience and trust; and technological factors like system usability and technology anxiety. Attitudinal mediators also play a crucial role in brid;ging motivations and behavioural intentions. These insights highlight the need for digital food service providers to strategically enhance convenience, reliability; and trust, while addressing psychological aspects such as technology anxiety to foster positive attitudes and increase adoption. Subsequent researches may extend these models by

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examining cultural and demographic moderating variables, enabling a deeper understanding of customer perceptions across diverse markets.

Delivery Agents' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service

Research on the effectiveness of digital food services from the perspective of delivery agents has gained momentum, particularly with the rise of gig-based food delivery platforms. Dominici et al. (2025) explored Italian customers' continued use of food delivery applications (FDAs) and, through a mixed-methods study incorporating focus groups and a Kano model-based survey, identified that fair riders' compensation is a pivotal 'must-be' requirement for customer satisfaction and reuse intentions. Other must-be attributes included effective customer service, reliable location tracking and data privacy. This implies that platform efficiency and consumer loyalty are indirectly dependent on the satisfaction and fair treatment of delivery agents.

Chen et al. (2025) specifically investigated factors influencing delivery drivers' order acceptance decisions in Taiwan using grounded theory and regression analysis. Their findings revealed that drivers' decisions depend on the earnings per order, pay rate multipliers, order departure and destination locations (particularly if they are in hot zones), and estimated idle time after delivery. For instance, idle time was shorter if the destination had many restaurants, increasing the likelihood of subsequent orders. These results highlight that drivers strategically evaluate each order based on profitability and time efficiency, which directly affects service promptness and platform reliability for customers. Their study provides a unique perspective by

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emphasising drivers' agency within platform structures to optimise their earnings, thus revealing that effective digital food service is also shaped by how platforms support driver decision-making.

Additionally, Tong and Sutunyarak (2024) examined food delivery riders' perceptions of fairness and organisational trust in China using structural equation modelling. They found that distributive, procedural; and interactional fairness perceptions significantly influenced riders' organisational identification, with organisational trust mediating these relationships. While financial technologies increased payment stability and convenience, digital technology integration such as real-time tracking and transparent communication improved operational efficiency and confidence. Their study suggests that fair treatment and trust foster riders' positive attitudes towards platforms, which is essential for maintaining reliable and committed delivery services.

While most studies focus on consumer satisfaction, Leung et al. (2025) provide contextual insights into young adults' usage of online food delivery platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic in Hong Kong, revealing that usability, usefulness, satisfaction and loyalty shaped their behaviours. Although their research centres on consumer perspectives, it indirectly emphasises the role of delivery agents in ensuring platform usability and service satisfaction, particularly during crises where reliability and timeliness are critical as it indirectly emphasises the role of delivery agents in ensuring platform usability and service satisfaction, particularly during crises where reliability and timeliness are critical.

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Generally, these empirical studies highlight that the effectiveness of digital food services is inherently tied to delivery agents' experiences and perceptions, including fair compensation, decision-making autonomy, technological support and organisational trust. Platforms aiming to improve service quality must, therefore, consider strategies that enhance delivery agents' working conditions and satisfaction, as these factors critically underpin timely, efficient and customer-valued food delivery services. Subsequent investigations may examine comparisons between different national contexts to further understand how cultural, regulatory and platform-specific factors shape the effectiveness of digital food services from the perspective of delivery agents.

Food Service Providers' Perceived Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Service

The effectiveness of digital food services, as perceived by food service providers, has become an important area of research, particularly in relation to how these platforms support operational efficiency, service delivery, and strategic decision-making. From the providers' perspective, a key consideration is whether digital food service platforms are owned and controlled by them or by third-party aggregators. Where platforms are externally owned, food service providers assess effectiveness based on the value these systems add to their operations, including visibility, customer reach, ease of integration, and the extent to which platform features justify adoption and continued use.

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Wyse et al. (2021) demonstrated that online food ordering platforms can be strategically designed to influence purchasing behaviour through embedded dietary interventions. While the study focused on consumer outcomes, it indirectly highlights how food service providers may judge platform effectiveness based on design features that allow menu structuring, information display, and nudging mechanisms that align with organisational goals. Providers therefore evaluate effectiveness in terms of how well platform design supports menu presentation, order accuracy, and the delivery of organisational values, such as health-oriented branding.

From an operational standpoint, Margono and Aprianingsih (2024) examined the digital engagement practices of full-service restaurants in Indonesia, revealing that digital platforms are evaluated by providers based on their ability to facilitate supplier relationships, marketing reach, and decision-making efficiency. Their findings suggest that food service providers perceive digital effectiveness through features such as feedback mechanisms, communication efficiency, data insights, and the flexibility to tailor digital interactions to different stakeholder segments. These criteria are particularly important where platforms are not provider-owned, as effectiveness is judged by the degree of strategic control retained.

Similarly, Sinha et al. (2024) emphasised that the design and usability of digital food service applications significantly influence satisfaction and continued usage. From the provider's perspective, effectiveness is reflected in how easily platforms enable order tracking, customer feedback management, service customisation, and error reduction. Ease of use, interface clarity, and

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reliable transaction processing become central indicators through which providers assess whether digital platforms enhance or hinder service delivery.

Overall, the effectiveness of digital food services from the perspective of food service providers is multi-dimensional and grounded in practical considerations. Providers evaluate effectiveness based on platform ownership and control, ease of use, system design, feedback and order-tracking capabilities, and the extent to which digital services support operational goals. These factors collectively shape providers' decisions to adopt, continue using, or disengage from digital food service platforms, particularly in environments dominated by third-party technologies.

Stakeholders' Challenges with the Use of DFS

Several issues and challenges have arisen because of the advent of digital food services in the last two decades (Buncaras, Trucilla, Rodriguez, Ayapana, Interia, Gumapas, & Tus 2022; Das, Sharma, & Anand, 2022) regarding customers, delivery agents and food service delivery of DFS.

Customers' Challenges with the Use of DFS

Several studies have explored the challenges that customers encounter when engaging with digital food services. Swink et al. (2022) examined the application of analytics technologies within restaurant supply chains in the United States and China. While their focus was on operational analytics, their findings revealed critical limitations impacting customers indirectly. These included lagging analytics capabilities, poor integration of data management systems; and challenges in demand forecasting, which often result in inventory

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mismatches, unfulfilled orders; and inconsistent service quality. Such limitations in backend systems translate into customer dissatisfaction, particularly when real-time availability data and supply chain responsiveness are inadequate to meet digital ordering demands efficiently.

In a qualitative study, Hannuksela (2025) investigated the barriers preventing customers from engaging in online grocery shopping in Finland. Through semi-structured interviews with 14 participants, the study identified several customer-facing challenges, including non-intuitive user interfaces, poor search functionality and limited delivery options. Additionally, the absence of real-time stock balances often led to unfulfilled orders, while concerns regarding cold chain management reliability created apprehension about food safety and quality. The study further highlighted that customers' desire greater integration of artificial intelligence to personalise shopping experience and optimise order accuracy, suggesting that current digital food service platforms fail to fully meet customer expectations in service design and technological sophistication.

Moreover, a quantitative study that was carried out by Das et al. (2022) also investigated the various challenges faced by customers in the utilisation of digital services and found that consumers were challenged by long delivery times and difficulty in the payment process. The ordered products were not supplied on time as expected (Sharma & Anand, 2022). However, it is clear that the study concentrated solely on customer challenges. The views of other parties, such as delivery agents and food service providers, on online food service applications will help to identify the problems and develop a comprehensive solution to them.

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Similarly, Vasan et al. (2025) conducted thematic analyses of interviews with consumers using food aggregator platforms in India. Their findings identified eight key challenges influencing consumer purchasing decisions: lack of transparency in charges, inconsistencies in delivery speed and quality, inadequate packaging, pricing issues, and safety concerns for delivery agents. Customers were also dissatisfied with errors in order fulfilment and the lack of timely resolution mechanisms for complaints. The study emphasised that while digital food services offer convenience and flexibility, these limitations significantly hinder the overall customer experience and can deter continued use if not adequately addressed.

Collectively, these empirical studies reveal that constraints and limitations in digital food services arise from both technological and operational inadequacies. Customers commonly experience dissatisfaction due to poor user interface design, lack of real-time inventory data, unreliable delivery processes, safety concerns, and insufficient complaint resolution mechanisms. To improve digital food service effectiveness, service providers must focus on enhancing backend analytics capabilities, optimising interface usability, and ensuring transparency. Future research should further investigate how integrating advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and real-time data systems, can mitigate these constraints to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Delivery Agents' Challenges with the Use of DFS

Delivery riders operating within digital food service platforms face numerous limitations affecting their safety, health and overall well-being.

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Boniardi et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive occupational safety and health (OSH) survey among 240 delivery riders in Milan, Italy. Their findings revealed alarming challenges, with 44% of riders working seven days a week and 23% working over eight hours daily, driven by the nature of gig contracts and economic necessity. Furthermore, 39% reported road accidents, linked to fatigue, vehicle type; and intense delivery schedules. Physical assaults (12%) and verbal abuse (28%) were common, alongside musculoskeletal disorders caused by prolonged riding and load carrying. The study highlighted that the lack of formal employment protections exacerbates these OSH risks, necessitating urgent interventions by policymakers and platform providers to ensure riders' decent working conditions aligned with global sustainable development goals.

Similarly, Han and Li (2023) investigated the occupational health rights of 405 food delivery riders in China, revealing systemic deficiencies in labour safety and protection structures. Their study found that safety protection measures were largely superficial, limited to clothing and basic equipment without addressing underlying occupational hazards. Riders' access to basic work injury and medical insurance was incomplete; and supplementary protection through commercial accident insurance was underdeveloped. Furthermore, in the event of serious accidents, riders often relied solely on weakened family support systems due to the absence of robust institutional mechanisms. The authors advocated for a comprehensive occupational injury protection system, integrating social and commercial insurance frameworks supplemented by community and family-based support to address these vulnerabilities holistically.

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Expanding on structural and operational constraints, Annosi et al. (2021) examined digitalisation practices within food supply chains, identifying barriers that indirectly affect delivery riders. Their qualitative study revealed that despite the adoption of big-data management solutions, collaboration tensions, lack of integrated digital processes and misaligned organisational practices create operational inefficiencies. These limitations can increase pressure on riders through poorly coordinated order systems, unrealistic delivery times and inadequate routing information, exacerbating work-related stress and risks. The study underscored that digital transformation within supply chains must prioritise inclusive and collaborative designs to reduce negative spillovers on frontline gig workers.

The studies underscore that delivery riders experience multi-layered constraints and limitations, including inadequate occupational safety and health protections, insufficient insurance coverage, high exposure to physical risks, verbal and physical abuse, and operational inefficiencies rooted in broader supply chain digitalisation challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving platform providers, policymakers, insurers and supply chain actors to develop policies and operational strategies that enhance rider safety, economic security; and dignity within the evolving digital food service landscape.

Food Service Providers' Challenges with the Use of DFS

Food service providers engaging in digital food service platforms face a range of challenges that impact operational efficiency, food safety; and service quality. Khan (2020) conducted a qualitative exploratory study on

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technological interruptions within restaurant services, highlighting how innovations in food delivery have redefined restaurant typologies and service classifications. The study identified major disruptions including a widening distance between service providers and customer contact points, leading to possible compromises in service quality and brand experience. While digital delivery services expand market reach, they simultaneously introduce challenges in maintaining consistent food quality, presentation and timely customer interaction, thereby increasing operational complexity for restaurant managers.

Similarly, Sartoni et al. (2025) investigated the digitalisation of food safety management systems (FSMS) through a Delphi study involving experts from academia, industry and consultancy. The findings revealed that while digitalisation offers opportunities to enhance the design, operation and maintenance of prerequisite programs (PRPs) and HACCP-related activities, significant managerial and technological constraints remain. The managerial constraints include financial burdens, resistance to change and a lack of digital competencies and training among staff, while technological limitations relate to system inflexibility, lack of user-friendliness, high data entry workload and concerns about system reliability. The absence of a clear regulatory framework further complicates the integration of digital FSMS, limiting food business operators' ability to fully capitalise on digital innovations in food safety management.

In addition, Vernier et al. (2021) examined the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within agri-food logistics, particularly in fresh produce supply chains. Their analysis identified that while

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ICTs facilitate better coordination, traceability and reduced food loss, several limitations hinder effective implementation. These include high costs of technological investments, insufficient digital infrastructure among supply chain actors and a lack of interoperability between different ICT systems, which compromises seamless information exchange. Furthermore, reliance on technology exposes food service providers to data security risks and operational disruptions in the event of system failures, highlighting the fragility of purely digital supply chain management systems.

Collectively, these studies underscore that food service providers face multi-dimensional constraints in digital food service operations, including technological limitations (system adaptability, interoperability; and reliability), managerial barriers (resistance to change, financial costs and skills gaps) and operational disruptions that compromise service quality and safety standards. To address these challenges, future research and practice must focus on developing cost-effective, adaptable; and user-friendly digital systems, alongside capacity building for staff and clear regulatory guidelines to ensure that technological innovations translate into sustainable and effective food service delivery.

Stakeholders' Satisfaction with the Use of Digital Food Service

Stakeholders' satisfaction with digital food service (DFS) systems is largely a direct outcome of how effectively the system performs, how useful it is for task completion, and the convenience it provides during use. In other words, satisfaction or dissatisfaction emerges from stakeholders' evaluation of whether the system meets expected levels of effectiveness, usefulness, and

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convenience, which constitute core dimensions of system quality. Recent empirical studies therefore demonstrate that stakeholder satisfaction is closely tied to how well digital food service platforms deliver functional value and service reliability within the broader digital ecosystem.

Recent studies highlight varying levels of satisfaction among stakeholders in the digital food service environment (Hazari, 2021; Siddiqi, Rahman, Tanchangya, Rahman, Esquivias, & Rahman, 2024; Sinha, Srivastava, Srivastava, Asthana, & Nag, 2024). For instance, Hazari (2021) examined stakeholder satisfaction with Foodpanda in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that diversification of services, such as expanding beyond food delivery to include groceries and essential products, enhanced customer satisfaction because the platform became more useful and convenient in meeting daily needs during lockdowns. The strategy also maintained employment continuity for delivery riders, thereby supporting their satisfaction through stable income opportunities. However, the study noted that not all stakeholders were fully satisfied due to operational limitations, implying that satisfaction depends on the extent to which system effectiveness and service quality meet varying stakeholder expectations.

From the customer perspective, Sinha et al. (2024) explored the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in online food services in India. Their findings emphasised that app quality and user interface design significantly influence customer satisfaction, suggesting that technological effectiveness and ease of use are key determinants of positive user experiences. When platforms are intuitive, reliable, and convenient, customers perceive greater value, which translates into higher

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satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Siddiqi et al. (2024), examining customer loyalty in Bangladesh's online food delivery sector, found that food and service quality alone are insufficient unless they translate into customer satisfaction. Rational pricing, simple payment methods, and prompt delivery were identified as critical factors shaping perceptions of usefulness and convenience, thereby reinforcing the argument that satisfaction emerges when system performance aligns with users' practical expectations.

Beyond customers, food service providers also evaluate satisfaction in relation to operational effectiveness and strategic outcomes. Calza, Sorrentino, and Tutore (2023), through a multi-stakeholder analysis of the food delivery ecosystem, highlighted the integration of environmental sustainability (ES) into customer experience (CX) processes. Providers viewed sustainability initiatives as enhancing brand image and strengthening overall stakeholder satisfaction. This suggests that provider satisfaction extends beyond immediate financial outcomes to include strategic effectiveness and long-term ecosystem value. The study further emphasised that achieving such outcomes requires collaboration among providers, delivery agents, and platform operators, highlighting that satisfaction depends on collective system performance rather than isolated platform functions.

Although fewer studies directly address delivery riders' satisfaction, Hazari (2021) observed that service diversification during the pandemic sustained employment opportunities and income stability, indicating positive satisfaction outcomes linked to perceived usefulness of the platform. However, occupational studies consistently point to challenges such as workload pressures, health risks, and limited social protection, suggesting that

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while DFS platforms may be effective in creating employment opportunities, rider satisfaction is moderated by working conditions and contractual arrangements. Thus, satisfaction among delivery agents reflects not only system convenience but also the extent to which the platform supports fair and sustainable work experiences.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that stakeholder satisfaction within digital food service ecosystems is fundamentally shaped by perceptions of system effectiveness, usefulness, and convenience. Customers evaluate satisfaction based on technological ease, reliability, pricing, and service delivery efficiency; food service providers assess satisfaction through operational performance and strategic sustainability outcomes; and delivery agents value employment stability while balancing occupational challenges. Therefore, understanding satisfaction requires an integrated stakeholder perspective that recognises it as an outcome of system quality dimensions rather than an isolated construct. Future research should adopt a holistic stakeholder approach that connects system performance, user experience, and ecosystem collaboration to optimise satisfaction across all actors within the digital food service environment.

Factors Influencing the Continued Use of Digital Food Service Among Stakeholders

The ability and desire to continue using a digital application is the resultant effect of many factors. Scholars have, therefore, argued that the continuance usage of an information or technological system is based on past experience on how easy and faster applications respond (Silva, Dias, &

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Rodrigues, 2022). For example, Silva et al. (2022) examined how various food delivery apps can be used continuously: a combined strategy for the health belief model and technological assent and willingness.

According to this study, self-efficacy, technological preparedness, perceived severity and perceived susceptibility all have an indirect impact on users' yearning to continue using meal delivery apps, while perceived utility and simplicity of use had a direct impact (Silva et al., 2022). However, the approach used in gathering the data (that is, through the use of a web-based convenience sampling procedure) may result in self-selection bias, making it more likely that the study will receive samples from users who have lower levels of internet fear. Again, because the study was limited to Portuguese users of meal delivery apps, conclusions cannot be extrapolated to other nations with distinct traditions (Silva et al., 2022).

Recent empirical studies have highlighted various dynamics that influence the continued use of digital food services among customers. Ramos (2022) examined customers' continued usage intention of food delivery apps (FDAs) in Mexico during the COVID-19 quarantine, using the UTAUT-2 model. The study identified effort expectancy, performance expectancy and price-saving orientation as significant predictors of continued use, while food and beverage quality were proposed as an additional construct. These findings suggest that customers continue using FDAs not only because of perceived ease of use and usefulness but also owing to economic considerations such as discounts or lower prices available through digital platforms.

Similarly, Teo, Liew, and Lim (2024) explored the continued purchase intentions for local food via online food delivery (OFD) services in Malaysia.

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The findings indicated that purchase intentions are highly influenced by price value, food quality, service quality and health factors, with price value appearing as the most important variable. Interestingly, gender moderated these relationships, where service quality was prioritised by females and price value by males. This gender difference provides nuanced insights for digital food service marketing strategies targeting specific consumer segments.

In Cambodia, Un and Ngoy (2024) investigated factors influencing satisfaction and continued usage intentions of mobile apps among food and beverage SMEs. Their study, integrating the Theory of Consumption Values and UTAUT, showed that perceived trust, social influence, conducive circumstances, online tracking, performance expectancy, usefulness, emotional value and intellectual value significantly affect continued usage. Social value influenced only satisfaction, while effort expectancy was insignificant, suggesting that perceived functionality, trust and emotional aspects are more critical for SMEs' sustained use of mobile applications for their operations.

For food service providers, Prasetyo et al. (2021) found that hedonic motivation, price, information quality and promotion strongly affect customer satisfaction and loyalty in online food delivery services in Indonesia, whereas usability factors such as navigational design and perceived ease of use were not significant. This implies that food service providers must focus on value-driven features, attractive promotions and accurate information to sustain customer engagement. Likewise, Jun et al. (2021), applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in Korea, identified perceived usefulness, enjoyment, trust and social influence as key determinants of customers'

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behavioural intentions to use online food delivery, reinforcing the importance of psychological and social factors in technology adoption in food services.

While empirical studies focusing explicitly on delivery agents' continued use intentions remain limited, factors such as fair compensation, organisational trust, platform support and manageable occupational risks influence their sustained participation, as reflected in earlier occupational safety and well-being studies among delivery riders. These factors affect their job satisfaction, organisational identification and loyalty towards digital food delivery platforms. These studies underscore that customer prioritise performance expectancy, economic value and quality aspects, food service providers rely on customer satisfaction drivers such as promotions, trust and emotional engagement, while delivery agents continued use hinges on fair treatment, safety; and platform support. Future studies could integrate these multi-stakeholder perspectives into holistic models to enhance sustainability and stakeholder satisfaction within the digital food service ecosystem.

Chapter Summary

The empirical literature has been covered in this chapter on stakeholders' experience with digital food services. Stakeholders' experience was reported to have been shaped by continuous usage of digital food service. There were more findings from studies relating to motivation of stakeholders using digital food service and effectiveness of stakeholders using digital food service. The literature on constraints with digital food service reported serves as an experience that individual stakeholders' encounter. The methodology for the study will be addressed in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall approach to the study processes, starting with the profile of the study area, followed by the underlying philosophical assumptions and the research design. The chapter also looks at data sources, target population, sample size, sampling procedures, research instruments and methods of data collection. The concluding part discusses the fieldwork issues, data processing and analysis, and ethical considerations.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA), a context that is particularly relevant for examining the effectiveness of digital food services (DFS) from the perspective of food service providers. AMA is Ghana's most urbanised and economically active metropolis, where rapid population growth, infrastructure development, and changing work and lifestyle patterns have significantly reshaped food consumption and service delivery systems (Cities Alliance, 2015; Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2020).

As Ghana's administrative and economic capital, AMA has undergone sustained urban transformation characterised by dense residential settlements, expanding commercial districts, and a growing concentration of hospitality establishments. Rapid urbanisation and rural–urban migration have contributed to continuous population growth, increasing the demand for

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convenient food services, particularly among working professionals (GSS, 2020). Long working hours, traffic congestion, and evolving work routines limit the time available for physical dining and home food preparation, thereby creating favourable conditions for the adoption and use of DFS by restaurants and fast-food operators (Nettey, 2020).

AMA's infrastructural development further reinforces its relevance to this study. The metropolis hosts Ghana's only international airport, Kotoka International Airport, and serves as the primary entry point for international travellers. It also accommodates the corporate headquarters of numerous firms and key tourism institutions, including the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, making it a hub for business and leisure activities (Cities Alliance, 2015). These characteristics have stimulated the growth of upscale restaurants and fast-food outlets, intensifying competition within the hospitality sector. In response, food service providers increasingly adopt DFS to enhance service delivery, improve operational efficiency, and maintain competitiveness.

From an economic perspective, AMA is the most productive metropolitan area in Ghana, accounting for a significant proportion of national GDP and foreign direct investment inflows (World Bank, 2020). The metropolis is also Ghana's largest industrial hub, with extensive electricity usage and high levels of internet connectivity, which collectively support the deployment of digital platforms in service operations (Pescina, 2013). These conditions enable restaurants and fast-food operators to integrate online ordering systems, digital payment platforms, and delivery applications into their service models, making AMA an appropriate setting for assessing DFS effectiveness.

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The hospitality landscape in AMA is highly diversified, comprising a wide range of graded restaurants and fast-food joints serving different customer segments. This concentration of hospitality facilities provides opportunities to observe variations in DFS adoption and implementation across different types of food service providers (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2023). The diversity in restaurant categories reflects differences in operational capacity, technological readiness, and strategic use of digital platforms, all of which are central to evaluating DFS effectiveness.

In all, AMA is suitable for this study due to the convergence of rapid urbanisation, population growth, demanding work lifestyles, traffic congestion, and technological advancement. These factors collectively shape both the demand for DFS and the criteria through which food service providers assess their effectiveness in terms of convenience, reliability, and operational performance (Nettey, 2020). Consequently, AMA provides a robust contextual foundation for examining the effectiveness of digital food services as implemented by food service providers in an urban Ghanaian setting.

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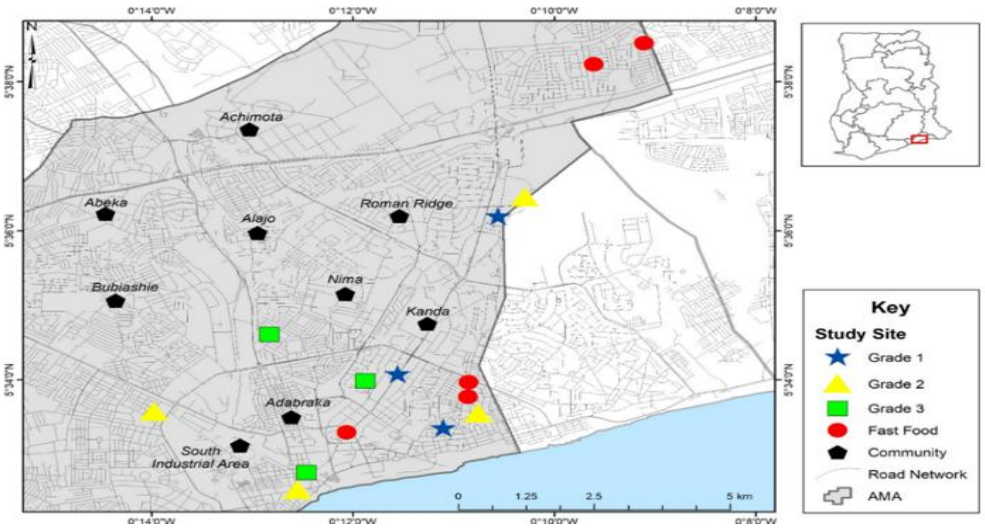


Figure 3: Map of Accra Metropolis Showing the restaurants and fast food Studied

Source: Cartography and Remote Sensing Unit of the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, UCC (2025).

The restaurants located in AMA include Heritage Indian Restaurant, Food Corner, La Chaumiere Restaurant and Imperial Perking Chinese Restaurant. The rest include Mamma Mia's Restaurant, Mazera Restaurant, Aerostar Restaurant, Atlantic Lobsters Restaurant; and Grand Taste. These novel deluxe restaurants are situated in AMA and are primarily popular with business travellers. Also, fast-food joints such as KFC, Masco Foods and Papaye, among others, are located in AMA. The largest concentration of variously graded licensed restaurants and fast-food outlets serving all customer types is found in AMA (Table 1).

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Table 1: Summary of Licenced Restaurants and Fast-Food Joints in the AMA as at 2024

Restaurant types	Total number
Grade 1	29
Grade 2	48
Grade 3	19
Fast food joints	14
Total	110

Source: Ghana Tourism Authority (2024).

Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to a worldview that guides the researcher's assumptions about knowledge development and informs methodological choices, such as whether to distribute questionnaires or conduct interviews. It is grounded in the pursuit and advancement of knowledge within a specific field of study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Positivism and interpretivism are the two most prevalent ontological and epistemological traditions or philosophies. Ontology holds that reality is what it is, while epistemology holds that the researcher and reality are related (Edirisingha, 2012). Positivists advocate robust analytical quantitative methodologies that evaluate numbers and disentangle respondents' emotions. Conversely, interpretivists favour humanistic qualitative approaches, which advocate more individualised and adaptable research frameworks to capture significance in human interfaces free from strictly organised structures (Edirisingha, 2012) as

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in the case of the customers and other stakeholders of DFS. The table (2) below provides a simplified explanation of research philosophy, highlighting the research approach, ontology, axiology, and research strategies.

Table 2: Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism

Philosophy	Research approach	Ontology	Axiology	Research strategy
Positivism	Deductive	Objective	Value-free	Quantitative
Interpretivism	Inductive	Subjective	Biased	Qualitative
Pragmatism	Deductive/ Inductive	Objective/ Subjective	Value-free/Biased	Quantitative and Qualitative

Source: Pizam & Mansfeld (2009)

This thesis centres on comprehending stakeholders' experience of digital food service systems. In view of that, this research adopts an interpretive philosophy to delve into the experiences of stakeholders in the AMA. From an epistemological standpoint, interpretivism asserts the subjectivity of knowledge, emphasising the absence of a singular version of reality or truth, but rather the existence of various and diverse perspectives regarding what is considered real (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivism further argues that knowledge, reality and the world are subjective, relative and value-based (Howell, 2013; Ryan, 2018). As Zahra (2006) points out, the social sciences interpretative paradigm aims to investigate the subjective realm of human experience while preserving the honesty of the phenomena under scrutiny. To accomplish this, researchers must immerse themselves and comprehend from within.

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This study aligns with the interpretative paradigm because it strives to enhance our comprehension of how key stakeholders understand the digital food service system, acknowledging the existence of multiple interpretations and perspectives. The interpretative framework and the research context both support qualitative techniques because of the study's exploratory and informative nature. The philosophical underpinnings of the social interpretative paradigm offer a valuable framework for guiding the attainment of the study's goals. In qualitative research, where the intention is to understand participants' experiences fully, interpretivism is mostly focused on the experience as it is "lived," "felt" or "undergone" (Webb, 1988). In order to capture meanings in human interactions with establishments like restaurants and fast-food chains, the study looks at the ''why'' and ''how'' of decision-making scenarios with small, concentrated participants in addition to the "what", "where" and "when".

Research Design

In alignment with the qualitative and interpretive paradigm underpinning this research, the study adopts a nested (embedded) case-study design. The primary case under investigation is the digital food service (DFS) phenomenon, rather than the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA) itself. AMA serves as the contextual setting within which the phenomenon is examined, not as the case. This distinction is critical for conceptual clarity and methodological rigour.

A case study design is particularly appropriate when the objective is to achieve an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon as it unfolds within its real-life context, especially where the boundaries between

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the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018; Schoch, 2020). In this study, DFS represents such a phenomenon, as its adoption, use, and perceived effectiveness are shaped by organisational practices, technological infrastructures, and contextual pressures within the hospitality industry.

To strengthen analytical precision, the study adopts a nested case-study structure, in which each restaurant that uses a DFS platform constitutes an individual case, embedded within the broader DFS phenomenon. This approach enables the examination of restaurant-specific motivations, adoption rationales, operational experiences, and evaluative criteria regarding DFS, while still allowing for cross-case comparison. Such a design is particularly important given that digital delivery services (DDS) are not unique to the food sector but are widely used across multiple industries, including retail and logistics platforms such as Amazon, AliExpress, eBay, and Jumia. Treating DFS as the core case avoids conflating industry-wide digital delivery practices with sector-specific dynamics in restaurant operations.

The nested case-study design further allows for the inclusion of multiple units of analysis such as food service providers, customers, and delivery agents without diluting the analytical focus of the study. These actors are examined in relation to each restaurant case, thereby providing insight into how DFS is implemented, experienced, and evaluated at the organisational level. According to Yin (2018), embedded designs are especially useful when a phenomenon can be meaningfully studied through sub-units that reveal variations in processes and outcomes within the same overarching case.

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Consistent with Hartley (1994) and Yin (1984), the case-study design facilitates a holistic and nuanced understanding of DFS by enabling the use of multiple data sources and in-depth inquiry. This depth of analysis is particularly valuable for exploring decision-making processes, perceptions of effectiveness, and stakeholder interactions surrounding DFS adoption insights that would be difficult to capture through survey-based methods alone. Given the relatively limited empirical research on DFS from the perspective of food service providers in Ghana, the nested case-study design provides an appropriate and rigorous methodological framework for addressing the study's objectives. Figure 3 presents an overview of the research procedure,

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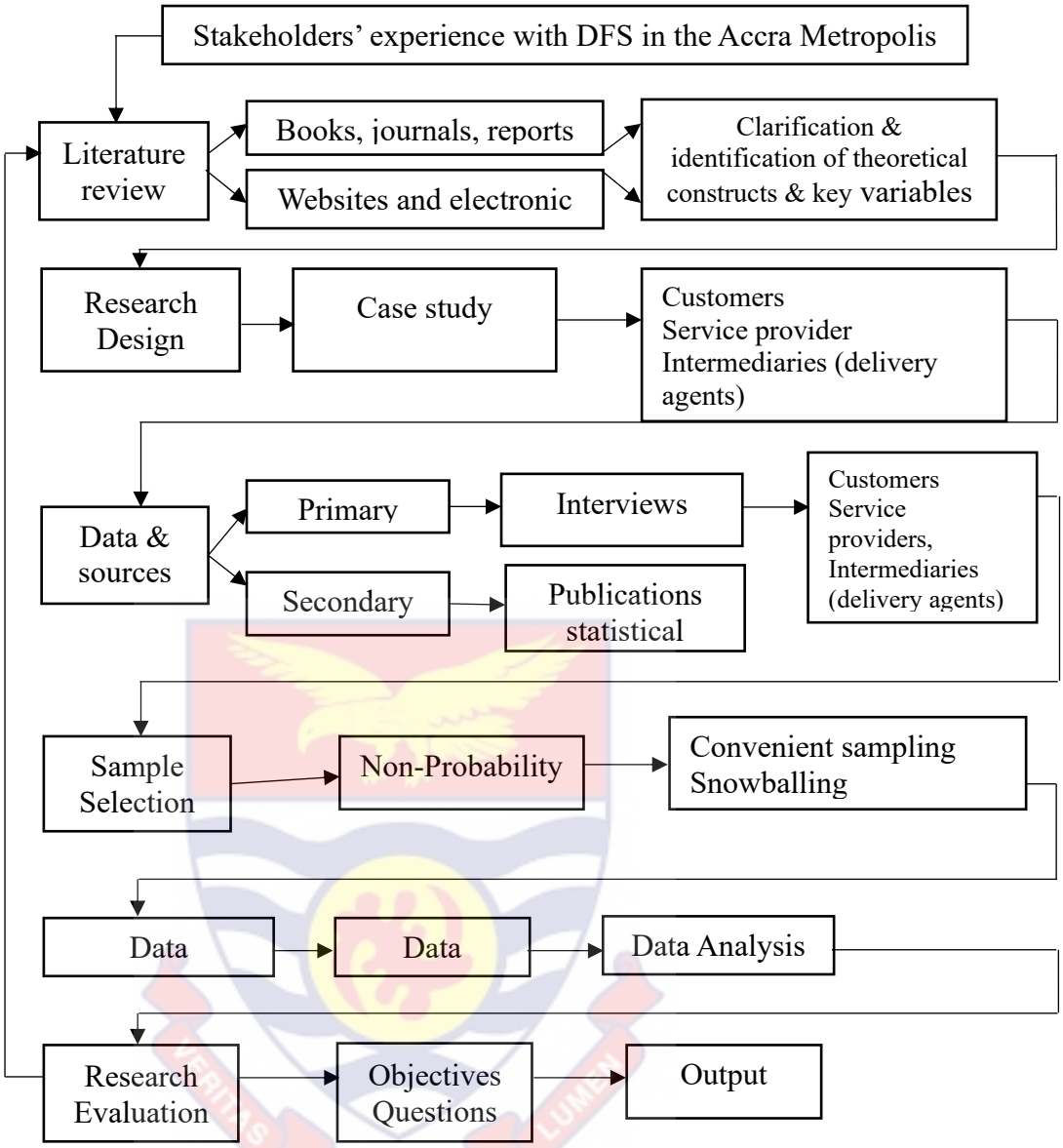


Figure 4: Research Methods Employed for the Study
Source: Adapted from Mensah (2012).

Target Population

The study population refers to the total aggregation of elements from which a sample is drawn (Babbie, 2007). Consistent with the study's focus on the effectiveness of digital food services (DFS) from the perspective of food service providers, the population was precisely defined to include restaurants

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and fast-food establishments that operate on DFS platforms and their associated delivery agents within the Accra Metropolitan Area.

The primary population comprises food service establishments that actively use DFS platforms for order placement, processing, and delivery coordination. These restaurants constitute the core analytical units of the study, as the investigation seeks to examine restaurant-specific motivations for DFS adoption, operational practices, and perceived effectiveness. Particular attention is given to how different establishments manage digital orders, respond to platform notifications, and coordinate internally to ensure timely service delivery, recognising that response efficiency may vary across businesses.

The secondary population consists of delivery agents who operate through DFS platforms and are functionally linked to the selected restaurants. These agents play a critical role in order fulfilment, especially in managing order collection and ensuring location accuracy. The study examines how delivery agents navigate operational challenges, particularly in instances where food service establishments delay order confirmation or preparation, and how such variations influence service delivery outcomes across different restaurant cases.

Customers were not treated as a distinct study population in this research. Instead, customer-related issues are captured indirectly through the experiences of food service providers and delivery agents, especially in relation to order errors, delivery delays, and communication breakdowns. This approach ensures analytical alignment with the provider-centred focus of the study and maintains coherence with the nested case-study design. Defining the

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study population in this manner, the research maintains a clear link between its objectives, methodological approach, and units of analysis, while enabling meaningful comparison of DFS implementation and service delivery practices across different restaurant operations.

Data and Sources

Both primary data and secondary information were used in the study. Due to the qualitative approach, customers and intermediates (delivery agents), as well as the service providers of the chosen restaurants and fast-food outlets, provided the primary data on experiences with DFS. The main data were gathered with the use of in-depth interview guides from the customers, certain service providers and delivery agents. Secondary information was obtained from published and unpublished literature such as books, journals and relevant articles on the internet. These include the list of licensed restaurants and fast-food joints in the Accra Metropolis and data from the Ghana Tourism Authority and Ghana Statistical Service respectively.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

In the context of qualitative research, an appropriate sample size is one that sufficiently addresses the research questions and enables in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The selection of participants targeted three stakeholder groups involved in digital food services (DFS), namely food service providers, delivery agents, and customers, with emphasis placed on their experiences and roles within DFS operations. These groups were selected based on their responsibilities, level of interaction with

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DFS platforms, and relevance to understanding DFS effectiveness within restaurant operations.

The study did not adopt a predetermined sample size at the outset. Instead, data collection proceeded iteratively until theoretical saturation was achieved, that is, the point at which no new insights or themes emerged from subsequent interviews. In total**,** thirty-eight **(**38) stakeholders participated in the study, comprising thirteen (13) food service providers, thirteen (13) delivery agents, and twelve (12) customers. While customers formed part of the study, they were included primarily to provide contextual and corroborative insights rather than as the core analytical group, which focused on restaurant operations and service delivery processes. Saturation for customers was reached when recurring experiences relating to ordering, delays, and delivery outcomes became repetitive and yielded no substantively new information (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014).

Non-probability sampling techniques, specifically convenience sampling and snowball sampling, were employed due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame for DFS stakeholders, particularly customers and delivery agents (Babbie, 2007). These techniques were considered appropriate given the mobile and dispersed nature of DFS users and workers. Convenience sampling was used to select participants who had experienced DFS and were willing to participate in the study, while snowball sampling was used to reach delivery agents whose work patterns made them difficult to access through formal means.

Customers were included based on the criterion that they must have used a digital food service platform at least once within the past six months.

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Customers were intercepted and approached at vantage locations within the Accra Metropolitan Area, and those who consented were interviewed until saturation was achieved. Given that customers were not the primary unit of analysis, their inclusion was limited to gaining insight into service outcomes rather than operational decision-making.

Delivery agents were selected based on the criterion that they must be actively engaged in food delivery through recognised DFS platforms, such as popular food ordering applications operating within AMA. Due to the itinerant nature of delivery work, snowball sampling was adopted, whereby initial participants referred the research team to other agents who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate. This approach enabled access to delivery agents who were directly involved in managing order pickup, navigation, and location accuracy.

Food service providers were selected using convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria required that a provider must have worked in a restaurant or fast-food establishment that operates on a DFS platform and must have at least one year of experience within the DFS value chain. This criterion ensured that participants possessed sufficient experiential knowledge of DFS adoption, order management, and coordination with delivery agents. Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times to allow for in-depth engagement. In sum, the combination of sampling techniques and stakeholder categories ensured methodological coherence with the qualitative, nested case-study design and provided sufficient depth and variation to address the study's research objectives.

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Table 3: Unit of Analysis, Instrument, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Respondents	Instrument	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Customers	Interview guide	12	Convenience
Food Service providers	Interview guide	13	Convenience
Delivery agents	Interview guide	13	Convenience and snowball
Total		*38*	

Research Instruments

A qualitative research tool was employed to gather data for this research, aligning with the social interpretive paradigm and the qualitative research approach. In line with the central focus of the study, which aimed to gain comprehensive insights into the experiences of digital food delivery services within the AMA, the researcher employed in-depth interviews (IDIs) as the data collection tool, using a semi-structured interview guide. In the field, three similar IDI guides were utilised, targeting all the stakeholders i.e., customers, delivery agents and food service providers. These IDI guides were available in the English language and were administered in either English, Twi or Ewe, depending on the interviewee's language preference.

IDIs serve as a powerful tool for acquiring rich and nuanced data, enabling an in-depth exploration of individuals' personal and private perspectives (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Jennings, 2010). They facilitate conversational interactions that are invaluable for investigating an individual's

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experiences, attitudes and values (Jennings, 2010; Silverman, 2009). Furthermore, the semi-structured interview guide does not overly restrict participants, allowing for a thorough discussion of key themes and the exploration of emerging ones (Jennings, 2010). Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that this method does have drawbacks, such as being time-consuming and susceptible to interviewer bias (Sarantakos, 2005). To mitigate these limitations, the interview format's flexibility was leveraged, enabling us to tailor the sequence of questions, adjust question phrasing as needed, pose follow-up queries for clarification and employ indirect questions to uncover latent opinions or recall.

The instruments were divided into five sections. The first section A, focused on stakeholders' motivation with digital food service. Subsequently, in section B, the study delved into stakeholders perceived effectiveness with digital food services. Also, sections C and D looked at constraints with digital food service and the continual usage respectively, and lastly, section E, aimed to capture the socio-demographic information of participants. These included age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, religion, level of education and employment status (See Appendix B).

Pre-Test Pilot Study

To evaluate the clarity and relevance of the research questions and ensure the effectiveness of the data collection instruments, a preliminary study was undertaken. This pre-test was conducted in October 2023 in the Cape Coast Metropolis, within the Central Region of Ghana. The exercise allowed the researcher to identify potential challenges in the field, refine the interview

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guides and make necessary adjustments to enhance the validity and reliability of the study instruments.

Cape Coast metropolis was selected for the pilot study because it attracts a huge number of tourists and shares comparable socio-economic, technological, and food service characteristics with the AMA, particularly in relation to the adoption and use of digital food systems. As a regional capital with a growing urban population, Cape Coast hosts a diverse mix of restaurants, fast-food outlets, and food vendors that increasingly utilise digital platforms such as mobile payments, online ordering, and delivery applications. This similarity made Cape Coast an appropriate testing ground for assessing the clarity, relevance, and applicability of the research instruments prior to actual data collection in AMA. Conducting the pilot study in a different but comparable location also helped to minimise respondent contamination and response bias in the main study area. This approach ensured that participants in AMA had not been previously exposed to the research instruments, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the data collection process.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants comprising five (5) customers, three (3) delivery agents and three (3) food service providers. The pilot study was very helpful to the research since it identified some errors in the layout of the guide. The researcher also used pre-testing to improve her interviewing skills in this area. Overall, the pilot study strengthened the methodological rigour of the research by enabling instrument refinement while preserving the integrity of the main study sample. After the pre-testing, necessary modifications were made to the instrument. Some of which include:

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1. The questions were shortened and reframed for simplicity and understanding of the interviewee, since the demeanour of some respondents during and at the end of the interview showed the extent of the length of the questions based on the interviewer's observations.
2. Some questions were deleted because respondents were unable to answer properly irrespective of the further explanations; and some questions were also similar.
3. Some questions were reframed to unravel stakeholders' experiences with digital food service applications.

Training of Field Assistants

The researcher recruited and trained three field assistants to help with data collection. Those recruited were post-graduate students who are experienced in data collection and have a background in the hospitality and tourism industry. They were given a two-day training, from 12-13 November, 2023 at the Hospitality and tourism Department, University of Cape Coast. On enumeration techniques, provided information regarding research ethics and translated questions based on the research objectives. Field assistants were taken through all the questions on the research instruments to ensure consistency in understanding and administration. Emphasis was placed on probing techniques, managing respondent consent, and maintaining confidentiality during data collection.

Although the study relied largely on phone-based interviews, the involvement of field assistants was necessary for several reasons. First, the assistants supported the scheduling and coordination of interviews, including

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initial contact with participants and follow-up calls. Second, they assisted in conducting and recording phone interviews, particularly with delivery agents and customers who were difficult to reach during working hours. Third, the field assistants supported note-taking, transcription, and verification of interview responses, thereby improving data accuracy and reducing researcher bias. Where required, they also assisted in clarifying responses and translating questions into locally understandable expressions without altering their meaning. In sum, the use of trained field assistants enhanced the efficiency, reliability, and consistency of the data collection process, despite the predominance of phone interviews.

Actual Fieldwork

An introductory letter from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of Cape Coast was presented to each study participant. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of study participants, their real names were replaced with codes. Given the divergent perspectives and beliefs held by customers, delivery agents and food service providers, the researcher conducted three separate IDIs to delve into the theories underpinning this study. The interviews were purposively conducted to capture the perspectives of all relevant stakeholder groups. The main data collection for the study was conducted between 18th December to 18th February, 2023, in person and via phone calls with the help of research assistants. Interviews with service providers were conducted on-site at their respective facilities, based on the time and dates they provided.

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In contrast, most interviews with customers and delivery agents were conducted over the phone due to their transient and mobile nature. Participants were selected based on their knowledge and experiences on the subject matter. The participants were conveniently selected; those who were ready and willing to be part of the study were selected. The rationale for the interview was explained to participants and the researcher asked for the time and place of convenience where the interview could be conducted. A schedule of dates, times and venues were compiled that guided the interview subject to minor changes from the participants.

On the day of the interview, participants who were able to read were given the opportunity to review the interview guide prior to providing informed consent to participate in the study. For face-to-face interviews, participants read the guide at the interview venue, while for telephone interviews, a copy of the interview guide was sent to participants in advance to allow sufficient time for review before the interview was conducted. The interviews averaged twenty-five (25) minutes, ranging from fifteen (15) minutes to a maximum of fifty (50) minutes. They were conducted both face-to-face and over the phone, with recordings made after obtaining participants' consent.

The semi-structured IDI guide included specific probing questions for each primary theme to skillfully extract additional information from the interviewees, preventing any undue deviation from the primary topic. After the interviews, the researcher extended her appreciation to the study participants for their valuable time and assured them that their responses would be handled with the highest level of confidentiality. In total, 38 participants participated in

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the interviews, with twelve (12) being customers, thirteen (13) service providers and thirty (13) delivery agents. The IDI guides were developed in English to ensure consistency in content and structure.

However, the interviews were conducted in English, Twi or Ga, depending on the language preference of each participant, to enhance inclusivity and facilitate effective communication. To complement the audio recordings, enumerators were provided with field notebooks to document observational notes and key points during the interviews. The recorded interviews were translated into English and transcribed. There was no objection from the participants to the audio recording of the interview by the researcher. However, the researcher always had a field notebook to capture major highlights and trends.

Fieldwork Challenges

In the course of the fieldwork, some challenges were encountered. Despite the scheduled date and time and a reminder to participants, some interviews were rescheduled. It was very challenging for participants to honour the time. To some of them, it is a privilege for you to have them as participants. Meeting some participants, especially food service providers and delivery agents, was a major challenge due to their busy schedules. However, the researcher subsequently scheduled telephone interviews with some participants and replaced others whose busy schedules did not permit their participation in the study. In such cases, the researcher contacted alternative individuals who were willing and available to take part in the study. These

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extended the scheduled data collection periods and exerted extra efforts on the researcher.

As indicated earlier, some participants preferred to be interviewed over the phone. However, incoming calls during the interviews occasionally interrupted the sessions, resulting in multiple recordings for some participants. These interruptions, however, did not compromise the quality of the data collected. In the case of interviews with food service providers conducted at their facilities, background music sometimes affected the clarity of the recordings and, at times, prolonged the interviewing process.

Data Processing and Analysis

As highlighted in Bryman's (2008) work, the examination of data stands as a pivotal element within the research endeavour, posing perhaps the most difficult challenge. Notably, the absence of well-defined protocols for conducting qualitative data analysis further underscores its complexity (Bryman, 2008). The processing and analysis of data were part of the data collection process. Upon completion of data collection, participants' profiles were analysed and presented in a tabular form (see Appendix A for the full list). The researcher's reflection on each interview was written in the field notebook to keep track of the highlights and patterns in each interview. The recorded audio from the interviews was manually transcribed in Microsoft Word and a soft copy was kept in a folder. The transcripts were read through to become familiar with issues in each interview. With the assistance of an Excel spreadsheet, all thirty-eight (38) (12-13-13) participants' responses were arranged on the deductive themes.

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The data analysis process in this study was based on the research design and methods employed during data collection. A thematic approach was utilized to analyse the data, as recommended by Boyatzis (1998). This method involves the identification, analysis; and reporting of patterns within the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Ritchie and Spencer (1994) have pointed out that there is a lack of clear guidelines for thematic analysis. To address this gap, they have proposed a framework that enables researchers to conduct rigorous and valid thematic analysis. It is important to note that their approach is not prescriptive and can be adapted to suit the specific research question and dataset. This research followed the framework approach (transcription, familiarisation, indexing and theming, and interpretation) for thematic analysis as outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). To ensure accuracy and reduce bias, a research assistant was hired simultaneously to transcribe and code themes for comparison and reconciliation of differences.

Stage one

In the first stage, the data was transcribed by iteratively listening to the tape records. Data from taped recordings and field notes were transcribed verbatim. The recorded audios from the interviews were played repeatedly and iteratively with each respondents' narrative typed out (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The respondents were assigned unique numbers for easy identification (Sweeney, 2000). The numbers were assigned according to the order in which participants were interviewed. Verbatim transcriptions of the audio interview were done, and dithering and interruptions were considered (Mclellan, Macqueen & Neidig, 2003). This is in line with keeping the information

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authentic and preventing it from being lost or misconstrued. The written data was read out while listening to the audio, making it much easier to understand what the interviewees were saying and spot the similarities and variances in their statements. A traditional manual method of handling data was preferred over computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). While digital tools such as NVivo and ATLAS to offer efficiencies, the manual process allowed for deeper immersion in the data and greater contextual sensitivity (Lim, 2025).

Stage two

In the second stage of the analysis, the interview transcripts and field notes, particularly those from participants who declined audio recording, were read repeatedly to enable deep familiarisation with the data. This iterative reading process allowed the researcher to immerse herself in the content, identify recurring ideas, and gain an overall understanding of participants' narratives. Subsequently, each transcript was analysed individually, and initial codes were generated to capture meaningful units of data relevant to the study objectives. As analysis progressed from one transcript to another, higher-order codes and potential themes were developed through constant comparison. The list of emerging themes was continuously refined, expanded, and revised as new insights and patterns emerged across the dataset. This systematic and iterative process ensured that the themes accurately reflected participants lived experiences and aligned with each research objective, in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

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Third and fourth stages

The third stage of the analysis comprised the systematic identification of recurring sub-themes and the generation of topic sentences that encapsulated the essential meaning of each sub-theme. The sub-themes were arranged and clustered under broader main themes according to conceptual similarity and relevance to the study objectives. The hierarchical organisation improved the comprehension of thematic relationships and strengthened the analytical coherence of the results.

The fourth stage involved a comprehensive verification process where the identified themes and sub-themes were systematically compared with the original data sources, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings. This procedure guaranteed internal consistency, analytical precision, and accurate representation of participants' narratives. Themes that exhibited inadequate empirical support or showed conceptual redundancy were refined, combined, or eliminated as needed prior to finalizing the thematic structure. The thorough cross-checking process improved the credibility and reliability of the analysis before finalizing the coding.

Final stage

The final stage of the analysis involved interpreting the refined themes and sub-themes and presenting the findings in a coherent and analytically meaningful manner. This process entailed synthesising the thematic results with the study objectives to ensure that each objective was adequately addressed. Relevant verbatim qualitative quotations were carefully selected and integrated into the narrative to illustrate key themes, amplify participants'

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voices, and provide rich contextual explanations of the findings. The interpretation moved beyond description to analytical insight, linking participants' experiences to broader conceptual and empirical discussions while maintaining fidelity to the original data. This approach enhanced the depth, credibility, and interpretive validity of the results.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis Framework

No.	Thematic Analysis Framework Phase	Description of the Process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work with the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	The initial opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating of the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006).

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Reliability and Validity Issues

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced a set of four criteria to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative research methods. These criteria served as a consistent framework guiding every stage of the research process, from data collection and analysis to the final presentation of findings. This approach was instrumental in establishing the credibility of the research.

Credibility; or the truth value of research findings was a primary concern. The researcher invested substantial time, more than one year, immersing herself in the subject matter and the context of the study area before initiating fieldwork. To further ensure the work's credibility, the researcher offered research assistants the opportunity to review transcripts for validation. The absence of comments from participants indicates the trustworthiness of the data. Moreover, the researcher took the initiative to contact some participants after data analysis to discuss and confirm the results, reinforcing the credibility of the research. The transparency of the research process and the methods of data collection also contributed to establishing credibility. Finally, the researcher provided comprehensive descriptions that accurately reflected the events and experiences encountered during the research.

Transferability, which assesses the applicability of research findings to other settings or groups, was another critical consideration. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasised the researcher's responsibility in providing a database that enables potential users to judge the transferability of the conclusions. The researcher meticulously documented all aspects of the study, including audio recordings and transcripts. Additionally, the study included extensive

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descriptions of the data and the case study destination, facilitating the evaluation of the findings' transferability, particularly in similar destinations like the Cape Coast Metropolis where the pre-testing occurred.

Dependability, synonymous with consistency, focused on whether the findings would remain consistent if the research were replicated. To enhance the accuracy and consistency of the results, the researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation of employing triangulation, a method involving multiple approaches to address the same research problem. The incorporation of various data collection methods added depth and credibility to the analysis. In this research, a methodological mix was employed, combining both secondary and primary sources, aligning with the notion that this would create a more robust and plausible dataset (Denzin, 1978). This approach exemplified a typical triangulation strategy and illustrated the researcher's commitment to achieving dependable outcomes.

Confirmability or neutrality assessed whether the researcher introduced any biases or personal motivations that could influence the research findings. The research actively ensured that data remained factual, minimising doubts and biases. This commitment to neutrality was upheld throughout the research. In qualitative research, achieving trustworthiness, which encompasses credibility, dependability and transferability, is contingent on the presence of these characteristics. The trustworthiness of this research can be illustrated by the diagram, which reveals evidence of credibility, transferability and dependability converging to establish Confirmability, a fundamental quality in qualitative research.

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Table 5: Validity and Reliability Strategies for the Study

Issue	Qualitative alternative	Strategies	Phase of work
Validity	Credibility	Use of multiple sources of evidence	Data collection
	Trustworthiness	Pattern matching	Data analysis
		Expert /peer review	Research instrument design
			Data analysis
			Draft case study report
			Entire research process
Reliability	Replicability Transferability	Detailed descriptions of issues	Data analysis, entire research process

Source: Author's Construct (2025).

Ethical Issues

Ensuring the ethical integrity of the research is very important (Bryman, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have eloquently delineated the customary ethical concerns, encompassing facets such as informed consent, the right to privacy and safeguarding participants from potential harm. Throughout the study, these ethical considerations were meticulously addressed at every juncture. Prior to initiating fieldwork, the researcher diligently adhered to the stipulations set forth by the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (UCC-IRB).

The initial cooperation of the interviewees was sought in person and in some cases via phone calls, to provide a comprehensive overview of the research. At the outset of each interview, participants were clearly apprised of their unequivocal right to withdraw from the study at any point, with no

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obligation to answer any questions. This approach fostered an environment of relaxation, ensuring respondents did not feel any undue pressure, which might otherwise have compromised the data quality.

To uphold the utmost confidentiality, personal information was never disclosed to any third party without the explicit consent of the participants. All interview recordings, transcriptions and associated documents were securely stored in a protected computer file. Furthermore, all participants were assured of anonymity through the meticulous omission of individual names, with codes serving as identifiers. This approach fostered an environment of candour and encouraged interviewees to share their perspectives freely, enriching the dataset with valuable, in-depth insights.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a clear methodological path of the research, taking into consideration the details of all the processes. The issues discussed were specific characteristics of the study. Within this research, a qualitative research method was adopted, with semi-structured interviews used in the collection of the data. The study was grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm and employed a cross-sectional phenomenological design to capture diverse contextual interpretations of stakeholders' experiences with digital food services. The following were also discussed: target population, sampling procedures, methods of data collection and research instruments. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and thematic analysis was engaged. Finally, consideration of the validity, reliability and ethical issues were presented. The next chapter begins the results and discussion section.

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CHAPTER FIVE

STAKEHOLDERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR USING DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on stakeholders' motivations for engaging in Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis. Drawing from interview data, the analysis identifies core motivations across three stakeholder groups: customers, delivery agents, and food service providers. Rather than allocating quotations to predetermined write-ups, this section adopts a thematic analysis approach, where all interview excerpts were reviewed, coded, and organised into broader motivational themes. The findings reveal both shared and group-specific motivations, including convenience, timeliness, economic benefits, flexibility, social status, privacy, accessibility, and market expansion.

Customers' Motivations for Using Digital Food Services

The rapid digital transformation of economic and social life has significantly reshaped food consumption patterns in urban centres. In the Accra Metropolis, Digital Food Services (DFS) have moved from being a novelty to becoming an integral component of everyday food access. Through platforms such as Glovo, Bolt Food and Hubtel, customers can browse menus, place orders, make digital payments and receive meals without physically visiting restaurants. Beyond customers, DFS platforms also engage delivery

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agents and food service providers, creating a digitally mediated ecosystem of food distribution.

Understanding the motivations that drive stakeholders to adopt and continuously use Digital Food Services (DFS) is critical for both theoretical advancement and practical application within the Accra Metropolis. This section concentrates specifically on customers' motivations, as revealed through qualitative analysis of interview data. The findings generated four dominant and interrelated themes: convenience and ease of use; timely delivery and reliability; privacy and social status considerations; and food accessibility and variety. These themes do not operate in isolation; rather, they collectively shape customers' behavioural intentions and sustained engagement with DFS platforms. Each theme is discussed in detail below, supported by expanded verbatim quotations and in-depth interpretative analysis to illuminate how customers construct meaning around their use of digital food services.

Convenience and Ease of Use

Convenience emerged as the most dominant and consistently articulated motivation among customers. Participants repeatedly described DFS platforms as simple, intuitive and requiring minimal effort to operate. The emphasis was not merely on technological availability, but on usability and cognitive simplicity.

One participant explained:

"With your phone and the app installed, you only need a few steps and you can order your food. It is straightforward… You don't need special training to buy your food" (C1, 26-year-old female customer).

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Another added:

> *"Once you open the app, you get to choose the restaurant and order the food. It is not anything difficult. Whether you know the restaurant or not, everything is displayed there clearly for you" (C4, 23-year-old male customer).*

These quotations reveal several important layers of meaning. First, customers highlight the minimal procedural barriers involved in ordering. The process is reduced to "a few steps," indicating low complexity. Second, the statement "you don't need special training" suggests that DFS platforms are perceived as universally accessible, even for individuals with limited technological expertise. This perception reduces anxiety associated with digital technologies and enhances adoption. Convenience was also framed in relation to time and physical effort. One participant reflected:

> *"We are in a technological era. Once you have your phone and the app, when you are hungry you just order ahead. In less than 15 minutes you can get your food wherever you are. It saves you the stress of going out to cook or queue somewhere" (C6, 25-year-old female customer).*

It can be viewed that, convenience extends beyond ease of navigation to include spatial and temporal flexibility. Customers can order from "wherever you are," reflecting mobility and location independence. The comparison with cooking or queuing highlights DFS as a stress-reducing alternative to traditional food acquisition methods. From a theoretical standpoint, this theme aligns strongly with effort expectancy under UTAUT. Customers are more inclined to adopt a system they perceive as easy to use and uncomplicated. The reduced cognitive load and simplified payment systems enhance behavioural intention. The data indicate that convenience is not a secondary feature but a foundational driver of DFS patronage in Accra.

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Timely Delivery and Reliability

Speed and reliability emerged as another central motivation. While convenience facilitates initial adoption, timely delivery sustains continued usage. Customers expressed strong emotional reactions to delivery delays, particularly when hungry. One participant remarked:

> *Nothing is much frustrating as ordering for food through an app and it delays. You can even lose appetite because you are waiting and checking your phone again and again" (C10, 24-year-old female customer).*

This quotation illustrates that delay is not merely an inconvenience; it has emotional and physiological implications. Hunger intensifies the expectation of speed, making timeliness a non-negotiable service attribute. Another participant explained:

> *"Most of the time when I am hungry, I patronise the delivery systems. At that point in time, I prefer a service that will deliver speedily. If not, I can even faint as a result of hunger" (C7, 32-year-old male customer).*

The hyperbolic expression "I can even faint" underscores the urgency attached to food delivery. DFS platforms are therefore perceived as solutions to immediate needs rather than optional luxuries. Reliability was particularly associated with specific platforms: *"Glovo delivers at a faster pace, so I mostly use their service. Some of the others will let you wait for too long" (C8, 29-year-old female customer).* Importantly, reliability was not limited to speed alone but included communication transparency: "*They will call you from the main office and tell you your food is being delayed or something. Most of the time they call, so you are aware" (C6, 25-year-old female customer).*

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This suggests that proactive communication mitigates dissatisfaction. Even when delays occur, being informed enhances trust. Thus, timeliness functions both as a performance benefit and a trust-building mechanism. Within the UTAUT framework, timely delivery aligns with performance expectancy. Customers believe DFS improves task efficiency by reducing waiting time and increasing predictability. In a city like Accra, where traffic congestion can complicate logistics, platforms that consistently deliver within expected timeframes gain competitive advantage and user loyalty.

Privacy and Social Status Considerations

A culturally nuanced and analytically significant theme was the role of social status and privacy in motivating DFS usage. Unlike purely functional motivations, this theme reflects symbolic and identity-related considerations.

One participant candidly stated:

> *"Hmmm… I use it because of who I am. I don't think I can go to certain places to eat. People will see me and I will be ashamed standing in a queue around a fast-food joint. It is not easy" (C7, 35-year-old male customer).*

Another similarly remarked:

> "*My status will not allow me to queue in public for food. I'm not too fond of it when I find myself in the numbers. You might meet someone you admire or feel shy of. So, I mostly use these food delivery services to order my lunch" (C5, 28-year-old customer).*

These statements reveal that DFS serves as a mechanism for managing social identity. Queuing publicly for food is perceived by some participants as incompatible with their social standing or personal image. DFS allows them to avoid visibility and potential judgement. Privacy was also emphasised:

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> *"Using the apps makes me feel comfortable because of who I am. You can buy food, receive it, eat it, and pay without anybody seeing what you are eating. As public persons we need some privacy" (C11, 35-year-old male customer).*

From the responses, it can be viewed that DFS is framed as a protective shield that ensures discretion. The ability to "hide your activities a bit" reflects the importance of controlled self-presentation in urban social settings. This theme corresponds with social influence under UTAUT. Behavioural intention is shaped not only by functional utility but also by perceived social norms and identity expectations. In this context, digital ordering is associated with prestige, modernity and discretion, whereas public queuing may be associated with lower status or unnecessary exposure. Thus, DFS adoption in Accra is partly symbolic. It enhances dignity, privacy and perceived prestige for certain customer segments.

Food Accessibility and Variety

Beyond technological and symbolic factors, practical food preferences also motivated DFS usage. Customers primarily ordered ready-to-eat meals, especially rice-based dishes. One participant noted:

> *"I usually order rice. In the afternoon it will be difficult for me to take food that is too heavy. The rice is lighter and affordable compared to other foods prepared by restaurants within my area" (C10, 26-year-old female customer).*

This quotation reveals three underlying motivations: the preference for light and suitable meals for lunchtime consumption, the affordability of the food option, and its familiarity within local dietary patterns. Another participant reinforced the importance of convenience and readiness of meals by stating:

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> *"Most of the time I order waakye or jollof because it is already prepared and I can eat it immediately when it arrives. I don't have the time to cook during working hours" (C3, 30-year-old male customer).*

Similarly, a different customer highlighted both variety and choice as motivating factors:

> *"What I like is that I can choose from different restaurants on the same app. Today I can order banku and tilapia, tomorrow pizza or shawarma. It gives me options depending on my mood" (C9, 28-year-old female customer).*

Other meals mentioned included jollof rice, waakye, banku with tilapia, fufu with light soup, kebabs and fast foods such as pizza and burgers. However, rice-based meals dominated. The prominence of rice suggests that DFS supports practical urban lunchtime needs. Many customers prefer already prepared, culturally familiar meals that require no additional cooking, particularly during busy working hours. DFS therefore enhances food accessibility by bridging the physical distance between restaurants and consumers' workplaces or homes, while simultaneously accommodating taste preferences and budget considerations.

From a performance expectancy perspective under UTAUT, customers believe DFS enhances their ability to access diverse meal options quickly and efficiently without physical effort. The availability of variety increases the perceived usefulness of the platforms and strengthens behavioural intention to adopt and continue using them. For food service providers and platform operators, this insight is strategic. Promotions, meal bundles and menu optimisation can be tailored around high-demand items such as rice-based meals, while still maintaining variety to cater for changing tastes. By aligning

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offerings with dominant consumption patterns, platforms can increase both customer satisfaction and profitability within the Accra Metropolis.

Across the four themes, customers' motivations for using Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis reflect a dynamic interplay between functional efficiency, emotional assurance, and socio-cultural identity management. Convenience and ease of use reduce both cognitive and physical effort, aligning with the concept of effort expectancy. Timely delivery enhances operational efficiency while simultaneously building trust in the service, reflecting performance expectancy. Privacy and social status considerations highlight the role of social influence in shaping behavioural intentions, while food accessibility and variety reinforce perceptions of usefulness and everyday practicality.

The findings therefore strongly corroborate the UTAUT model. Customers adopt DFS not merely because the technology is available, but because it is perceived as easy to use, fast and reliable, socially appropriate and discreet, and practical for accessing preferred meals. In the Accra context—where rapid urbanisation, persistent traffic congestion, and evolving social identities intersect—DFS platforms function not only as technological tools but also as social instruments. They respond simultaneously to hunger, time pressure, convenience needs, and identity considerations, thereby embedding themselves within both the functional and socio-cultural fabric of urban life.

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Delivery Agents' Motivations for Engaging in Digital Food Services (DFS

This section examines the motivations that drive delivery agents to engage in Digital Food Services (DFS) within the Accra Metropolis. While customers are primarily motivated by convenience and timeliness, delivery agents approach DFS from a livelihood and work-structure perspective. Their engagement is largely shaped by broader labour market conditions, the operational design of digital platforms, income expectations, and the accessibility of enabling technologies such as smartphones and mobile internet. For many agents, participation in DFS is a strategic response to economic realities rather than merely an opportunistic choice.

Analysis of the qualitative interviews revealed five major themes underpinning delivery agents' motivations: flexible working structure, income and payment structure, employment opportunities, ease of use and accessibility, and platform efficiency. These themes collectively demonstrate that delivery agents' involvement in DFS is economically and structurally rational. Their decisions reflect calculated responses to unemployment pressures, the need for predictable and reliable income streams, and the appeal of platform-enabled autonomy. In essence, DFS represents both a survival mechanism and a flexible income-generating pathway within the evolving digital economy of the Accra Metropolis.

Flexible Working Structure

Flexibility emerged as the most dominant and frequently cited motivation among delivery agents. Unlike conventional employment models

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characterised by fixed schedules and managerial supervision, DFS platforms offer agents temporal autonomy and self-regulation. One participant stated:

> *"Our work is such that you can choose the time you want to work or not to work. I can decide to work at my own convenient time. Whether in the morning, afternoon, or evening, that depends entirely on me. It is not like a government job that you have to report to work at 8 am and close at 5 pm, no" (A1).*

Another participant reinforced this position:

> *"Sometimes I work from morning to afternoon and sometimes too throughout the whole day. We work from Monday to Sunday. If you can do it, then that is up to you. You have the freedom to make yourself available or not" (A6).*

These narratives demonstrate that DFS platforms provide what may be described as algorithmic flexibility, the ability to log in and out at will. Delivery agents are not bound by rigid contractual hours, which makes DFS particularly attractive to young individuals balancing multiple responsibilities such as schooling, family obligations, or other side businesses.

The comparison drawn by A1 between DFS and a "government job" is particularly instructive. It highlights a perceived contrast between bureaucratic employment systems and gig-based digital labour. The delivery agents perceive DFS as liberating rather than restrictive. Flexibility here is not merely about working hours; it represents autonomy, control, and reduced institutional pressure. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with performance expectancy under the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Agents perceive that the platform improves their work-life arrangement by allowing them to optimise time use. Flexibility

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therefore becomes both a motivational and retention factor. However, while flexibility is empowering, it also transfers economic risk to the agent. Income becomes dependent on availability, demand levels, and personal effort. Thus, flexibility is simultaneously an opportunity and a responsibility.

Payment Structure and Financial Reliability

Beyond flexibility, payment structure emerged as a critical determinant of platform preference and continued engagement. Delivery agents consistently emphasised transparency, predictability, and timeliness of payment. A participant noted:

> *"I am using it because of how they do their payment. So, most of the guys prefer to use Bolt because the moment you send the order your delivery fee is part" (A2).*

Another explained:

> *"The delivery platform's payment is good. They pay you on time, it prompt. Unlike other services where payment becomes a big challenge. Digital food services payment is not like that. You know exactly what I will be paid for the work done" (A1).*

These statements indicate that payment reliability builds trust in the platform. Agents value systems where earnings are clearly calculated and disbursed without delay. The phrase *"you know exactly what I will be paid"* suggests transparency reduces uncertainty, which is critical in gig work environments. Interestingly, differences in payment cycles (weekly versus monthly) influenced platform preference. While some agents preferred weekly aggregation of earnings (as reported with Glovo), others valued immediate commission inclusion (as with Bolt). What remains consistent, however, is that commission structure is the primary driver of platform loyalty.

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This finding confirms that DFS platforms operate within a competitive gig economy where delivery agents strategically select platforms offering higher or more predictable earnings. Commission attractiveness therefore becomes a labour-retention strategy. Theoretically, this reflects performance expectancy (UTAUT), as agents believe the platform enhances their economic outcomes. Additionally, predictable payments serve as a facilitating condition, reinforcing sustained platform usage.

Employment Opportunities

Another major motivation relates to employment generation within a context of youth unemployment in Ghana. DFS platforms function as alternative labour markets for young people, including graduates. One participant remarked:

> *"Yeah… the most important thing is helping the youth with unemployment… some of the guys have completed school, and we have some graduates among us but because no work, no jobs we are managing this one for now. It's not that much better but we are managing" (A13).*

This statement reflects both economic necessity and resignation. The phrase *"we are managing"* suggests DFS is viewed as a coping mechanism rather than an ideal long-term career. Conversely, another participant expressed relative satisfaction: "*For now, what I am doing, I don't necessarily need any other job. This is okay for me" (A12).*This contrast demonstrates that Digital Food Services (DFS) play dual roles in the livelihoods of delivery agents. For some, DFS serves as a stop-gap survival strategy, providing temporary income while they search for more permanent employment. For

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others, it functions as a primary source of income, sustaining their day-to-day living and offering a degree of financial independence.

In a labour market characterised by limited formal employment opportunities, DFS offers accessible work with low entry barriers. Minimal qualifications are required to get started, and often the only essentials are ownership of a motorbike and access to a smartphone. This ease of entry makes DFS an attractive option for youth seeking flexible and immediate work opportunities. This aligns with empirical evidence indicating that gig platforms reduce short-term unemployment pressures in urban areas. From a social influence perspective (UTAUT), participation may also be encouraged by peer networks, as many youths observe others earning through delivery work. However, concerns about income sustainability suggest DFS may not yet constitute stable long-term employment. It functions more as a flexible income-generation platform than a fully institutionalised career pathway.

Ease of Use, Accessibility, and Platform Efficiency

Ease of use and accessibility emerged as central motivations for delivery agents engaging with Digital Food Services (DFS). Participants consistently highlighted that onboarding is straightforward and technologically undemanding. One participant noted:

> *"The apps are there on Play Store… it's easy to install or register… it is easy to operate and use it. You don't pay anything to use it, all you need is a motorbike" (A1).*

Another added:

> *"It is accessible on all Android smartphones. You can easily access them. You don't have to worry yourself so much in getting the apps" (A7).*

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These accounts point to two key factors: low technological complexity, requiring no specialised training, and minimal financial barriers, as registration is free. In Accra, where smartphone penetration and mobile internet access are high, DFS platforms are readily accessible. Features such as intuitive navigation, GPS integration, and automated order assignment further reduce operational complexity.

From a theoretical perspective, this reflects effort expectancy under the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). When technology is perceived as easy to use, adoption likelihood increases. Delivery agents are more willing to participate because cognitive and technical demands are low, which also reduces operational stress and allows them to focus on delivery efficiency rather than troubleshooting technology. Beyond accessibility, platform efficiency was also a key motivating factor. Participants emphasised that features such as GPS tracking, automated order allocation, route optimisation, and integrated communication tools streamline the delivery process. As one agent explained:

"Yes, even though I have my motorbike to aid my movement, I can only move as a delivery agent when the delivery app gives me the order. I have subscribed to various apps that help me track orders" (A3).

This demonstrates that the app functions as the core operational system coordinating supply and demand; without it, delivery work cannot occur. Efficient platforms reduce idle time, enhance accuracy, and increase earning potential. By minimising waiting time and optimising routes, DFS platforms improve productivity and economic output, reinforcing continued engagement. From a UTAUT perspective, these features exemplify facilitating conditions,

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showing how technological infrastructure directly shapes agent motivation and sustained participation.

Food Service Providers' Motivations for Engaging in Digital Food Service

The rapid adoption of Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis has not only reshaped customer behaviour but also transformed the operational strategies of food service providers. Restaurants, cafes, and fast-food outlets are increasingly integrating DFS platforms such as Bolt, Glovo, and Hubtel into their business models. This shift is largely motivated by the need to remain competitive in an increasingly digital market and to capitalise on opportunities for business growth. Understanding the motivations behind food service providers' engagement with DFS is critical for platform developers, policymakers, and entrepreneurs, as it sheds light on the factors that enhance adoption, increase market penetration, and ultimately sustain the digital food economy.

Analysis of the interview data revealed four major motivations among food service providers for adopting DFS: market expansion, revenue growth, operational efficiency, and ease of use. Each of these themes is discussed below, incorporating participants' verbatim accounts and a critical examination of the underlying implications.

Market Expansion and Customer Growth

A dominant motivation for engaging with DFS platforms was the potential to expand market reach and attract new customers. Providers observed that

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digital platforms eliminated geographical barriers and extended their service areas beyond traditional walk-in traffic. As one participant explained:

"If it were a normal situation where people would have to come to my restaurant before they eat, I would not be able to reach many people. But when I signed up for Bolt and Hubtel, my customers increased in number. This is to say that place is not a barrier as far as digital food service is concerned and our riders can access the customers' location" (SP8, a 37-year-old female food service provider).

Another provider corroborated this observation, emphasising the numerical growth of online orders:

> *"Ever since I subscribed to the online platform for sales, my customer base has increased astronomically. So, if I compare those who walk in here and those who buy online, I can say those who buy or order online are more. If I put both together the number is huge" (SP4, a 25-year-old female food service provider).*

These narratives highlight that DFS platforms serve as market expansion tools, effectively broadening the consumer base beyond physical proximity. This aligns with Farris et al. (2010), who argued that digital platforms enable businesses to reach wider audiences, particularly in urban settings where consumers are tech-savvy. By leveraging these platforms, food service providers gain access to customers who may not have otherwise visited their establishments, increasing visibility, and enhancing brand recognition. Furthermore, the removal of location constraints underscores the role of digital technology in overcoming traditional logistical barriers, thereby supporting a performance-driven motivation for platform adoption.

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Linked closely to market expansion, revenue growth emerged as a key motivator for DFS adoption. Providers acknowledged that increasing customer numbers translated into higher sales volumes and improved financial performance. Participants shared their perspectives:

> *"The more people we reach online, the higher the sales. I can see the financial benefits directly from the platform. My revenue has grown since we started using digital apps" (SP9, a 31-year-old male food service provider).*

Revenue generation is a practical and measurable outcome of DFS adoption. This finding resonates with Gupta et al. (2022), who noted that businesses engaging in online food delivery often experience sales growth due to enhanced exposure and operational scalability. By providing a platform for continuous ordering, digital apps not only increase transaction volumes but also enable food providers to implement promotional strategies, attract repeat customers, and stabilise cash flow. The linkage between market expansion and revenue growth demonstrates a clear cause-effect relationship, reinforcing that financial incentives are a central driver for platform engagement.

Operational Efficiency, Timeliness, and Ease of Use

Food service providers identified operational efficiency, timeliness, and ease of use as key motivations for engaging with Digital Food Services (DFS). Digital platforms streamline ordering processes, reduce manual errors, improve order tracking, and simplify operational workflows, allowing providers to manage workloads more effectively and deliver food promptly to customers. One participant emphasised:

> *"Time is precious, and our digital platform respects that. They make sure your food gets to you fast, so you can spend less*

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time waiting and more time enjoying good foods" (SP1, a 29-year-old female food service provider).

Another added:

"There is no stress. I find it easy to pick up orders and work on them fast so that my customers don't have to wait for a long while" (SP12, a 25-year-old female food service provider).

In addition to efficiency, providers highlighted the ease of use of DFS platforms as an important factor:

"The apps are not difficult to use… you just need a small education about it" (SP3, a 30-year-old female restaurant manager) …. "The system doesn't require much effort to operate. With a little effort, you can handle it" (SP5, a 26-year-old male food vendor).

These narratives demonstrate that DFS platforms enhance operational efficiency by reducing bottlenecks, minimizing manual interventions, and improving order fulfilment accuracy and speed. This aligns with findings from Shah et al. (2022), who highlighted that technology-driven platforms enhance service reliability and workflow efficiency. Improved timeliness not only increases customer satisfaction but also allows providers to handle larger volumes of orders with the same resources, promoting scalability and business sustainability.

Ease of use further reduces barriers to adoption, particularly for small or less technologically experienced vendors. This aligns with the effort expectancy component of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), which posits that perceived simplicity and usability strongly influence technology adoption. User-friendly DFS platforms enable even micro and small food enterprises to leverage digital tools for business growth, minimise training costs, reduce operational

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errors, and enhance overall satisfaction. In the context of Accra, where urban congestion can impede physical deliveries, the combination of operational efficiency, timeliness, and low technical complexity provides a decisive competitive advantage for food service providers.

Cross-Stakeholder Motivational Patterns

The Analysis of the motivations of customers, delivery agents, and food service providers in the Accra Metropolis reveals both shared and role-specific drivers of engagement with Digital Food Services (DFS). Across all stakeholder groups, three core motivations consistently emerged: ease of use, timeliness, and economic benefit. These factors demonstrate that DFS, while operating as a unified ecosystem, satisfies different needs depending on stakeholder roles.

Customers emphasised privacy, social status, convenience, and timely delivery. Ease of use was highlighted repeatedly by participants who noted that intuitive app interfaces allowed them to navigate menus, place orders, and make payments with minimal effort (C4, 23; C1, 26). Timeliness was equally important, as participants linked prompt delivery with satisfaction and reliability (C6, 25; C7, 32). Social status and privacy were further considerations; DFS allowed customers to maintain prestige and avoid public queues, aligning with Cohen et al. (2017) on the role of social status in behavioural choices. The emphasis on convenience reflects contemporary urban lifestyles where time-efficiency is highly valued (Ahmad, 2022; Rane et al., 2023). These motivations resonate strongly with effort expectancy and performance expectancy from the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of

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Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), where perceived ease of use and performance benefits influence behavioural intentions.

Delivery agents, on the other hand, prioritised flexibility, accessibility, employment opportunities, and payment structure. Participants appreciated the freedom to choose working hours (A1, 23; A6, 25) and to select which customers or restaurants to serve (A4, 25), reflecting a desire for work autonomy. Reliable and prompt payment was a major driver for platform preference, particularly for Bolt and Yango (A1, 23; A2, 27; A12, 25), indicating that economic security and financial predictability are critical motivators. These findings support prior studies emphasizing the role of DFS in providing urban youth employment opportunities and supplementing livelihoods (Gugelev, 2018; Jia et al., 2022; Dadzie et al., 2020). Payment structures, coupled with ease of use, also reinforce the UTAUT framework's focus on facilitating conditions as determinants of technology adoption and continued use.

Food service providers were primarily motivated by larger market share, timeliness, and ease of use. Digital platforms allowed businesses to reach customers beyond geographical constraints, increasing order volumes and revenue (SP8, 37; SP4, 25), echoing Farris et al. (2010) on the link between customer reach and profitability. Timeliness of service enhanced operational efficiency, reducing the need for manual order handling and allowing faster customer fulfilment (SP1, 29; SP12, 25). Ease of use of the platforms lowered technical barriers, enabling adoption even among smaller operators (SP3, 30; SP5, 26). These motivations align with extant literature highlighting convenience, operational efficiency, and market access as key

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drivers for DFS adoption (Hoang & Le Tan, 2023; Nivornusit et al., 2024; Huang & Siao, 2023).

The findings illustrate that DFS adoption in Accra is guided by role-specific but interrelated motivations. Customers' desire for convenience, speed, and privacy reflects global trends in online food delivery where performance expectancy and social influence influence adoption (Pramezwary et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2022). Similarly, delivery agents' preference for flexible scheduling and reliable payments mirrors research on gig economy workers' motivations, highlighting the importance of financial predictability and autonomy (Semblante et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2024). For food service providers, the emphasis on expanding market reach and operational efficiency resonates with studies showing DFS as a strategy for increasing visibility and sales in competitive urban markets (Ramesh et al., 2023; Ofori et al., 2022).

The application of UTAUT theory provides a coherent explanatory lens. Customers' focus on ease of use, timeliness, and social influence maps onto effort expectancy, performance expectancy, and social influence, which shape technology adoption intentions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Delivery agents' and providers' motivations correspond with facilitating conditions, as infrastructure, app reliability, and payment systems enable sustained engagement. Collectively, the findings underscore that while DFS functions as a single ecosystem, the perceived benefits are contingent on stakeholder role, reflecting differentiated value creation across customers, delivery agents, and food service providers.

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In essence, the study confirms that DFS adoption is not solely technology-driven; it is equally shaped by social, economic, and operational factors. Aligning platform features with these motivations; such as prioritising timely delivery, user-friendly interfaces, flexible work options, and efficient payment mechanisms, can foster greater adoption, satisfaction, and ecosystem sustainability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter concludes by emphasising the motivation for using digital food services: timely delivery, ease of use, social status etc. from customers, delivery agents and food service providers. The study also highlighted these stakeholders' experiences with digital apps as well as the reasons for patronising the various apps. The frequency of delivery apps, types of meals ordered by customers and frequency of use of delivery apps were also captured in the chapter.

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CHAPTER SIX

STAKEHOLDERS' MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of stakeholders' experiences with Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis, with particular focus on platforms such as Glovo, Bolt Food, and Hubtel. In response to the reviewer's comment, the analytical lens has been refined to conceptualise stakeholders' perceptions within a multidimensional experience framework. Accordingly, the chapter examines stakeholders' overall experience with DFS by drawing on user experience literature and digital service evaluation frameworks. Within this framework, stakeholders' experience is conceptualised as comprising four interrelated dimensions. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which the DFS platform enables stakeholders to achieve their intended goals, while efficiency concerns the ease and speed with which tasks are completed. Satisfaction represents stakeholders' overall evaluative judgement of the service encounter, whereas emotional response captures affective reactions such as trust, confidence, or frustration. Adopting this multidimensional perspective enables a theoretically grounded and analytically coherent assessment of DFS performance across customers, delivery agents, and food service providers.

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Customers' Experience of Digital Food Services

Customers constitute the demand-side stakeholders whose adoption, continued usage, and loyalty ultimately determine the sustainability and growth of digital food service (DFS) platforms. As primary users of these platforms, their perceptions provide critical insight into how well DFS systems perform in meeting market expectations. In this study, customers' experiences were examined through the multidimensional framework outlined earlier; effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional response. Analysing their experiences across these dimensions allows for a comprehensive understanding of not only whether the platforms function as intended, but also how customers evaluate and emotionally respond to their interactions with the system. This approach moves beyond a narrow assessment of functional performance to capture the holistic nature of customer experience within the digital food ecosystem.

Effectiveness (Goal Achievement)

From the customers' perspective, effectiveness primarily relates to goal achievement—specifically, whether the DFS platform enables them to successfully order, receive, and consume their desired food in accordance with their preferences and expectations. In practical terms, effectiveness is reflected in the platform's ability to facilitate accurate transactions, ensure reliable delivery, and accommodate individual customer needs without undue difficulty.

Participants consistently indicated that the digital platforms enhanced their ability to achieve intended outcomes. Customers reported that the

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systems enabled them to place orders successfully without technical complications, customise meals according to dietary preferences or restrictions, track deliveries in real time, resolve complaints through structured communication channels, and receive appropriate substitutions where items were unavailable. The availability of special instruction sections, allergy notifications, and direct communication features with vendors contributed significantly to the perception that the platform was capable of delivering on its functional promises.

Moreover, customers highlighted that real-time tracking features provided transparency and reassurance throughout the ordering process. The ability to monitor delivery progress reduced uncertainty and enhanced confidence in the system. Similarly, responsive customer service mechanisms—such as in-app messaging or quick feedback channels, strengthened the perception that issues could be resolved promptly if they arose.

Thus, effectiveness, from the customer standpoint, extends beyond merely completing a transaction. It encompasses accurate order processing, reliable fulfilment, adaptability to individual preferences, and the presence of functional recovery mechanisms in instances of service failure. This multifaceted understanding of effectiveness underscores the importance of system reliability and performance consistency in shaping customers' overall experience with digital food services in the Accra Metropolis. One participant emphasised the functional strengths of the platform, stating:

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"…Yeah, it's very fast, it is very smooth to use… especially their customer service, they reply so fast… sometimes they WhatsApp or message you or sometimes too they give you another food" (C6, 25-year-old female customer).

This excerpt illustrates that goal fulfilment extends beyond mere order placement. The platform not only facilitates successful transactions but also provides responsive customer support and corrective measures when problems arise. Such mechanisms enhance users' confidence in the system and reinforce perceptions of effectiveness by ensuring that service failures are promptly addressed. Similarly, the availability of customisation options further strengthened customers' perceptions of goal achievement. As one participant explained:

> *"Yes, if you have an allergy there is an option for you to write whatever you want them to take out… if the vendor cannot provide what you want, they will tell you to contact a different vendor" (C4, 20-year-old male customer).*

The ability to specify dietary restrictions and receive immediate feedback from vendors reflects system-level functional effectiveness. It demonstrates that the platform is not merely transactional but adaptive to individual customer needs. These findings align with Hidayah et al. (2021), who argue that digital platform effectiveness is closely linked to service quality and system reliability. They also corroborate Saad (2021), who identified delivery time, food condition, and service quality as central determinants of online food service success. It can be seen that from the customers' perspective, effectiveness is operationalised through successful order processing, accurate and timely delivery, efficient service recovery mechanisms, and the fulfilment of personalised preferences.

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Efficiency (Ease and Speed)

Efficiency, within the context of digital food services, refers to the ease of navigation, speed of service delivery, and the overall reduction of effort required to complete transactions on the platform. For customers, efficiency is closely associated with convenience, timeliness, and the smooth functioning of the application interface. It reflects how quickly and effortlessly users can move from browsing menus to placing orders and receiving their meals without unnecessary delays or complications.

Customers frequently emphasised that the platforms were straightforward and user-friendly. For instance, one participant remarked, *"It's very fast… it is very smooth to use"* (C6, 25-year-old female customer), clearly indicating that both speed and interface simplicity contributed to her positive assessment of the platform. This statement reflects minimal cognitive effort in navigating the application and suggests that the design features support seamless task completion. Participants further noted that features such as real-time order tracking, automated notifications, and quick in-app communication enhanced operational efficiency by keeping them informed throughout the transaction process.

In the context of the Accra Metropolis, where traffic congestion and long waiting times are common, efficiency assumes even greater significance. Customers indicated that digital food platforms saved them considerable time and physical effort that would otherwise have been spent travelling to restaurants or waiting in queues. Thus, efficiency is not merely a technical attribute but a practical solution to urban mobility challenges.

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These findings align with the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), particularly the constructs of performance expectancy and effort expectancy (Venkatesh et al., 2003), which suggest that perceived usefulness and ease of use significantly influence behavioural intention and continued usage. When customers perceive the platform as fast, intuitive, and convenient, they are more likely to sustain patronage.

However, instances of poor efficiency, such as delayed deliveries, system lags, or misplaced orders—were reported to negatively affect customers' willingness to reuse the service. Delays were perceived not only as operational inefficiencies but also as a breach of expectation. This observation reinforces the arguments of Vu (2021) and Wee et al. (2022), who contend that speed and reliability are fundamental determinants of competitiveness and sustainability within digital food ecosystems. Consequently, efficiency remains a critical experiential dimension shaping customers' continued engagement with DFS platforms.

Satisfaction (Evaluative Judgement)

Satisfaction reflects customers' overall evaluative judgement of their experience in relation to their prior expectations. Unlike effectiveness, which focuses on goal achievement, satisfaction captures a broader and more holistic assessment of the service encounter. It incorporates not only whether the transaction was successfully completed but also how customers perceive the overall value, quality, and professionalism associated with the service. One participant emphasised the importance of service quality in shaping her continued patronage:

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> *"Service quality is key for me to patronise services in any form… The packaging must be neatly done" (C9, 29-year-old female customer).*

This response illustrates that satisfaction extends beyond the functional delivery of food to include packaging aesthetics, perceived professionalism, and food presentation. In this regard, customers evaluate the entire service experience rather than isolated components of it. Satisfaction therefore encompasses several interrelated elements, including timely delivery, professional and hygienic packaging, responsiveness of customer service, and consistency in service performance across multiple transactions.

Furthermore, high levels of satisfaction were closely associated with intentions to reuse the platform and recommend it to others. Customers who consistently experienced reliable and professionally delivered services expressed greater confidence in the platform and demonstrated stronger loyalty tendencies. This finding aligns with Bhattacherjee's (2001) expectation-confirmation model, which posits that satisfaction—arising from the confirmation of expectations, significantly influences users' continuance intention. Thus, within the context of digital food services in the Accra Metropolis, satisfaction emerges as a critical determinant of sustained usage and positive word-of-mouth behaviour.

Delivery Agents' Experience of Digital Food Services

Delivery agents act as operational intermediaries who bridge the gap between food service providers and customers. Their role is critical in ensuring that orders are fulfilled accurately and on time, and their experiences provide valuable insight into the operational effectiveness of digital food

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services (DFS). In this study, delivery agents' experiences were analysed using the multidimensional framework, focusing on effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional response. Understanding their perspective helps to identify both system strengths and operational challenges, particularly in areas such as task coordination, communication, and navigation within the Accra Metropolis.

Effectiveness (Operational Goal Achievement)

For delivery agents, effectiveness primarily relates to the system's ability to facilitate successful task completion. This includes receiving and accepting orders, navigating accurately to customer locations, delivering food as requested, and confirming payments efficiently. Effective digital food platforms, therefore, must support seamless operational workflows and minimise the likelihood of errors that could affect service quality. One participant highlighted the transactional aspect of effectiveness, stating:

> *"When I deliver too and the person pays the money the system will quickly indicate he has paid… unless there is a bad network" (A12, 25-year-old male delivery agent).*

This illustrates the importance of accurate and real-time payment confirmation as part of overall operational effectiveness. In addition to transactional accuracy, the precision of customer location information emerged as a key determinant of perceived effectiveness. As one participant noted:

> *"Some of the apps can give you wrong locations… but Shark Express is mostly on point" (A4, 23-year-old male delivery agent).*

These accounts demonstrate that effectiveness for delivery agents is not limited to order completion; it also encompasses accurate navigation, system

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reliability, and timely updates. Errors in location or delayed transaction confirmations can significantly reduce operational efficiency and compromise service quality, highlighting the critical role of system functionality in ensuring DFS effectiveness from the delivery agents' perspective.

Efficiency (Time and Route Optimisation)

For delivery agents, efficiency primarily concerns the ability to complete delivery tasks with minimal effort, time, and operational obstacles. Key aspects of efficiency include quick notification of new orders, real-time updates on order status, accurate GPS navigation, and the reduction of delivery delays. Participants consistently emphasised that precise geolocation features significantly minimised trial-and-error navigation, allowing them to reach customers promptly and without unnecessary detours. As one delivery agent explained:

> *"...Once you feed the system with the right location, the app will take you straight to the location without much difficulty" (A6, 28-year-old male delivery agent).*

Another participant highlighted the importance of timely notifications and updates:

> *"When an order comes in, I get the alert immediately, and the app shows me exactly where to go. This saves a lot of time, especially during peak hours" (A3, 24-year-old male delivery agent).*

Similarly, a delivery agent noted the benefits of route optimisation for overall workflow:

> *"The app guides me through the fastest route and gives updates if there's traffic or delays. It helps me deliver more orders in less time" (A9, 26-year-old male delivery agent).*

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Efficient routing not only reduces travel time and fuel costs but also enhances overall productivity and ensures faster turnaround for customers. By streamlining navigation and providing timely updates, DFS platforms enable delivery agents to manage multiple orders more effectively, maintain service reliability, and contribute to a positive customer experience. This reinforces the platform's operational efficiency as a critical dimension of stakeholders' overall experience.

Satisfaction

Delivery agents' satisfaction with digital food services was closely tied to the reliability and clarity of the systems supporting their work. They reported higher satisfaction when orders were clearly communicated, payment systems functioned smoothly, and platforms provided prompt support for any issues encountered during deliveries. One delivery agent explained:

> *"It is good because the instructions are clear, and I know exactly what to do. Payments are usually confirmed quickly, so I don't have to worry about chasing customers or the app" (A7, 26-year-old male delivery agent).*

Another participant added:

> *"When the app works well and the restaurant responds quickly, it makes my job easier, and I feel confident that the customer will get their order on time" (A9, 24-year-old female delivery agent).*

However, satisfaction was occasionally compromised by infrastructural challenges, particularly poor network connectivity, which disrupted communication and delayed feedback. As one participant noted: *"Sometimes I don't get feedback early… like when it's raining" (A1, 23-year-old male*

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delivery agent). These responses highlight that while system functionality and responsiveness enhance satisfaction, external factors such as internet reliability can directly influence delivery agents' overall experience, underscoring the importance of robust technological infrastructure to maintain consistent service quality.

Food Service Providers' Experience of Digital Food Services

Food service providers constitute the supply-side stakeholders in the digital food ecosystem, whose operations are increasingly mediated by DFS platforms. Their experiences are critical to understanding the operational effectiveness, efficiency, and overall service quality of these platforms, as they are responsible for fulfilling orders, managing inventory, and coordinating with delivery agents. Examining their perspectives provides insight into how DFS platforms support or hinder operational processes and highlights the factors that influence provider satisfaction and overall service reliability.

Effectiveness (Order Accuracy and Coordination)

From the perspective of food service providers, the effectiveness of DFS platforms is primarily reflected in the accurate transmission of orders, prompt communication regarding complaints or special requests, and seamless confirmation of payments. Providers consistently indicated that accurate order transmission is a key measure of effectiveness, ensuring that customers receive exactly what they requested, which in turn reduces errors, minimizes waste, and enhances inventory control. One participant noted:

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> *"Most of the time, it's accurate… What people want to get, that's what we give them" (SP8, 34-year-old female food service provider).*

Another participant emphasized the importance of communication and coordination with the platform:

> *"The apps give an option for review and complaints. If there is something wrong, they complain, and once they do, we get the complaint quickly and act" (SP3, 30-year-old female restaurant manager).*

These statements underscore that effectiveness encompasses both order accuracy and timely operational coordination. Accurate orders reduce waste, improve inventory management, and enhance service reliability, while prompt handling of complaints ensures smooth workflow, maintains customer satisfaction, and strengthens the provider's confidence in the DFS platform. Thus, effectiveness from the providers' standpoint includes not only technical precision but also operational coordination that supports reliability, efficiency, and consistent delivery of high-quality service.

Efficiency (Real-Time Synchronisation)

Efficiency for food service providers is closely linked to the ability of digital food service platforms to facilitate real-time coordination between apps, restaurants, and delivery agents. Participants reported that seamless integration and immediate updates across all operational points significantly enhanced workflow, reduced delays, and minimised operational confusion. One restaurant owner noted:

> *"Everything is connected… the communication is very swift and I don't face any difficulty at all" (SP13, 36-year-old male restaurant owner).*

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Another participant similarly emphasised the benefit of real-time updates:

> *"Once an order comes through, I can see it instantly, prepare the food, and have it ready for the delivery agent without waiting… it makes the whole process very smooth" (SP7, 32-year-old female restaurant manager).*

These statements highlight how real-time synchronisation allows for smooth order processing, timely preparation, and accurate dispatch, thereby optimising both operational efficiency and service delivery. Such efficient coordination is consistent with the findings of Dhir et al. (2020), who emphasised that digital platforms enhance organisational performance by enabling instantaneous communication and synchronisation across multiple actors within the service chain. Overall, real-time integration ensures that food service providers can manage orders more effectively, reduce errors, and maintain high levels of productivity.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction among food service providers was closely linked to operational ease, responsiveness of the digital platform, and the ability to effectively reach customers. Key factors contributing to satisfaction included reduced operational confusion, faster resolution of complaints, and the expanded reach to a larger customer base. Providers particularly valued the structured communication channels offered by the platforms, which allowed them to receive feedback promptly and act on it efficiently. As one participant noted:

> *"If there is something wrong, they complain, and once they do, we get the complaint quickly and act" (SP3).*

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Another participant emphasised the role of digital platforms in maintaining smooth operations and reducing delays:

> *"The apps make it easier for us to manage orders. Once an issue is flagged, we know immediately and can resolve it without affecting other deliveries" (SP7, 32-year-old male restaurant manager).*

These statements highlight how timely communication, efficient complaint handling, and reliable order management contribute to food service providers' overall satisfaction, reinforcing their confidence in the effectiveness of digital food services.

Cross-Stakeholder Synthesis

Across all stakeholder groups, three cross-cutting enablers of positive experience with Digital Food Services emerged: effective communication, system responsiveness, and accuracy—both in orders and in customer location. While these factors were common across groups, stakeholders prioritised them differently. Customers placed greater emphasis on service quality and overall satisfaction, reflecting their focus on the outcome of the transaction and the quality of the service encounter. Delivery agents highlighted the importance of location accuracy and timely system responsiveness, which directly affect their ability to complete deliveries efficiently. Food service providers, on the other hand, focused primarily on order accuracy and real-time integration, which are critical to operational coordination and seamless service delivery. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of DFS is not merely functional but

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multidimensional, encompassing efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional response alongside traditional measures of system performance.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reconceptualised stakeholders' perceptions of Digital Food Services within a multidimensional experience framework comprising effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional response. The findings reveal that effectiveness relates to goal achievement, including accurate orders, successful delivery, and operational coordination. Efficiency concerns the speed, ease, and real-time responsiveness of service processes. Satisfaction captures stakeholders' evaluative judgements of service quality, while emotional response reflects affective reactions such as trust, confidence, or frustration.

By integrating these dimensions, the chapter moves beyond a narrow functional understanding of effectiveness and provides a theoretically robust assessment of DFS performance in the Accra Metropolis. The study contributes to existing literature by extending effectiveness into a multidimensional experiential construct, identifying location accuracy as a distinct operational dimension, and highlighting stakeholder-specific variations in experiential priorities. The next chapter builds upon these findings to explore the implications for policy, platform design, and strategic optimisation of digital food ecosystems.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

STAKEHOLDERS' CHALLENGES IN USING DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES IN ACCRA METROPOLIS

Introduction

The emergence of digital food services in the Accra Metropolis has changed the face of food delivery, providing efficiency and convenience to consumers, food service providers; and delivery personnel (Bannor & Amponsah, 2024). However, stakeholders in this ecosystem are confronted with several obstacles that limit the overall efficacy of these services, notwithstanding the numerous advantages (Bannor & Amponsah, 2024). This chapter sought to examine stakeholders' challenges in using digital food services.

Customers' Challenge with Digital Food Services

Despite the several benefits that customers enjoyed while using digital food platforms, the data analysis showed that customers encountered some challenges when using digital food services. These constraints are basically grouped into economic, social and technological. Among these challenges are the high cost of delivery fee or charges, deception on the part of service providers, and poor connectivity.

High Cost of Delivery Fee or Charges

Customers may not frequently utilise a service if they believe the delivery costs are excessive, particularly in places where prices are crucial

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(Womack, & Jones, 2015), such as the Accra Metropolis. The delivery cost can outweigh the convenience and ease that digital food services offer, leading customers to explore alternative options such as cooking at home or opting for traditional food vendors. From the customers' perspective, the delivery cost was quite high compared to the actual price of the food. This is how a customer put it:

> *The prices for delivery of just a food package are too much. I remember ordering a portion of food for 45 cedis and I paid 15 cedis for delivery. That is too much for just one package. It is really expensive (C8, a 29-year-old customer).*

Another customer had this to say:

> *The charges alone sometimes discourage me from ordering food online. Some of them charge as much as half of the price of the actual food price so if I had other means of getting food I wouldn't have to order food because of the charges (C9, a 28-year-old customer)*

The above narratives show that high delivery charges (in some cases, amounting to fifty percent of the food price) can deter customers from making use of digital food services. For some, going ahead to patronise the service at that fee is economically unwise when there are relatively cheaper alternatives of getting food close by.

Deception on the Part of Service Provider

Deception emerged as a significant concern highlighted by participants regarding their experiences with the DFS in the Accra Metropolis. They expressed that the images or flyers on the food service websites and billboards sometimes do not accurately represent the food they receive. Consequently, customers feel misled by these food service providers. A customer noted that:

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> *I think their pictures or graphics are there. It doesn't depict the food you are selling but it's a fair idea that this person or restaurant is selling braised rice, jollof and the other person yeah, you understand sometimes it is like what you ordered versus what you got (C6, a 25-year-old customer).*

Another one had this to say:

> *I was once disappointed with the quantity and quality of food a delivery agent brought to me. What ordered wasn't what I had. The food did not look attractive (C8, a 27-year-old customer).*

The above narratives reveal that customers sometimes receive food services that fall short of their expectations. Service providers frequently showcase appealing images of their offerings but fail to deliver on them.

Poor Connectivity

Digital food services depend on online payment systems, necessitating a stable network connection. Insufficient connectivity can result in payment processing errors, resulting in incomplete transactions and possible sales loss. Also, customers expressed frustrations with network issues hindering their online payment experiences. Below is a direct quote from a customer:

> *Umm...some of the constraints I faced are the payment…umm…I mean the MoMo payment system they must do something about it. Sometimes you must pay cash to the rider but maybe you want to pay MoMo on the platform, but it is not working…that's all and that's with the bolt foods (C5, a 28-year-old customer).*

A customer was of the view that sometimes the network can frustrate you when you want to order the food:

> *Can you imagine when you are hungry in the afternoon and the network jams up? You can try several times and the services*

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> *will not be going through. Sometimes when it happens as such you have to find another alternative and buy (C6, a 27-year-old customer).*

This viewpoint of these customers is an indication that a weak or unstable internet connection can lead to delays in placing orders, as the app or website may take longer to load, or transactions might not go through immediately. This can frustrate customers and lead to cancelled orders. The analysis showed that customers face constraints such as high delivery fees, deception from service providers, and poor connectivity challenges. Several implications could be drawn from these challenges. For instance, customers may become dissatisfied and begin to distrust digital food providers as a result of high delivery costs and deception from digital food providers. This creates a bad reputation for the platforms, and the customers may not use the platforms consistently anymore. There is the possibility of reduced customer loyalty when customers feel deceived by food service providers. High delivery costs can make DFS not affordable limiting accessibility to higher income groups only.

This finding aligns with the findings of Vasan et al. (2025) who emphasises high delivery charges; and lack of transparency from service providers as the challenges that customers face while patronizing online food services. These challenges were also observed in this study. Nonetheless, the challenges unaccounted for by Vasan et al.'s (2025) was poor internet connectivity and poor food quality. This may be due to contextual differences, given that their study was conducted in the United Kingdom which typically does not have the issue of poor internet connectivity (Oughton et al., 2018). Additionally, the United Kingdom food quality standards are more strictly

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adhered to (Kodirkhonov, 2025), and as such, customers may not have to face the challenge of poor food quality as frequently as a customer in the Accra Metropolis. Furthermore, even though this current study did not find delayed deliveries as a constraint unlike the study by Das et al. (2022), there is still enough evidence in the current study to suggest that customers face challenges which need to be addressed to ensure customers enjoy the use of digital food services.

Delivery Agents' Constraints with Digital Food Services

Despite the growing popularity of these platforms, delivery agents often encounter challenges such as language barrier, delays on the part of customers and service providers, wrong location; and poor network connectivity, which can delay order processing and navigation. Delivery agents who participated in this study shared their frustrations under the following themes.

Language challenges

The efficacy of digital food services can be severely hampered by language differences, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like Accra. Essential information like delivery locations, special requests and order changes might be difficult to understand when clients and delivery agents speak different languages or dialects (Overbeek et al., 2012). Language challenges can generate misunderstandings that can result in wrong orders, delays and unhappy customers (Diabah, 2021; Overbeek et al., 2012). One participant elucidated that:

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> *…another issue is different language…I'm not that comfortable with Ga and can't speak some other languages. For instance, I delivered food to someone and the person couldn't speak Twi, so I was forced to speak my allo English…not easy ooo…*(A12, 26-year-old delivery agent).

To buttress the point made by A12 concerning the language barrier, A10 had this to say:

> *You know we are dominated by Ga-speaking people within this region. Because of that if you are unable to speak the Ga language it makes your communication with your clients very difficult* (A10, 24-year-old delivery agent).

From the narrative, language commonality is imperative for digital food services. However, sometimes, there were differences in language which made communication between delivery agents and customers quite difficult.

Delays (Customer/Food service provider)

One of the obstacles to digital food services is delay by the customer. Delivery agents are made to wait for the customer before handing over the food. This slows down the overall delivery process. Some customers take too long to answer calls, give directions, or pick up their items. A classic example is captured below:

> *Let's say, the sun is scorching pa…., and I call the customer and the customer is saying I'm coming, I'm coming, especially ladies, and she is not coming, I have to contact Bolt. Everything I have to contact Bolt'* (A1, 23-year-old male delivery agent).

Delivery agents are likewise made to wait for the food when picking it up from the food service providers. This slows down the overall delivery process. These delays may also cause schedule disruptions for delivery agents, hindering their ability to complete other orders on time and adversely affecting

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their earnings. The service providers (restaurants) were also to blame for delays in certain circumstances. A delivery agent commented that:

> *"hmm…they (customers) delay our work ooo..umm..sometimes you will get a ride, but you get to the restaurant and the food is not ready for pick up. It happened to me at a restaurant Labone, I got there and the manager told me to wait for 5mins and I waited for about 10mins before they gave me the food'* (A2, a 27-year-old delivery agent)

Extended waiting periods can diminish food quality and frustrate customers. Such delays may negatively impact the efficiency and reputation of the digital food provider, resulting in fewer deliveries and a decline in customer satisfaction leading to decreased customer retention.

Wrong Location

Another constraint that delivery agents were confronted with was locational issues. The location challenges were largely attributed to faulty maps. Participants asserted that sometimes, the map will redirect to a wrong location. A participant noted that:

> *Kwabenya and Haatso are the same locations. Last time I had to deliver some food to someone at Kwabenya and some Goil filling station, but the map took me to Haatso, so when I got there, the customer said no, it was not Haatso, I had to bring the food to Kwabenya, sometimes the map can misbehave (A2, a 26-year-old delivery agent).*

Another participant also shared his experience with the wrong location as far as the delivery of food to a customer was concerned.

> *… I delivered some food at Korle-bu when I got to James Town, the boxing arena, the map showed me to enter the sea, so I passed the other sides, sometimes if you use Google map,*

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> *it will hurt you. Sometimes, experience counts, because I know some places* (A1, 23-year-old delivery agent).

The selection of appropriate delivery locations is of paramount importance in the field of logistics, as an erroneous choice may result in considerable inefficiencies. When delivery personnel are sent to incorrect destinations, they consume fuel that could have been conserved through proper routing. This unnecessary fuel usage not only erodes profit margins but also escalates operational expenses. Furthermore, regular instances of misrouted deliveries can negatively affect daily delivery volumes. Each journey that necessitates additional fuel consumption constrains the number of deliveries a driver can accomplish within a specified timeframe, ultimately impacting overall service efficiency and customer satisfaction. Therefore, ensuring the accuracy of delivery locations is essential for sustaining profitability and enhancing logistical processes.

Network Challenges

Network issues greatly hinder the effectiveness of digital food services by interrupting communication among customers, delivery agents and food service providers. Poor internet access complicates tracking deliveries, order processing and supplying real-time updates. Unreliable networks create navigation difficulties for delivery personnel, making it tough to locate customers or get accurate directions. One interviewee expressed the following:

> *… okay that is where we have some challenges. Sometimes when you are chatting with them you can see that the network is slow because sometimes it takes a while for the customer to reply to you* (A7, a 29-year-old male delivery agent).

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Another one had this to say:

> *Nothing is as painful as reaching the destination of a customer and the network jams-up. You don't know whether to take the delivery back or to keep calling. There have been instances where I have had difficulty with a network (A6, a 27-year-old delivery agent)*

Network issues reduce the efficiency of the service, leading to delayed deliveries, frustration among users and potential revenue loss for digital food platforms. The constraints that confronted delivery agents in the digital food business span from a language barrier, delays on the part of customers in receiving their goods, wrong locations of customers and network constraints. This finding could mean that delivery agents will likely use additional time and resources to locate the correct addresses when customer locations are incorrect. This has the potential to lower their profit margin. This may come about as a result of increased fuel usage and the limited number of deliveries they can make. Due to network limitations, delivery agents, customers and the food service provider cannot communicate immediately. Longer delivery times may result in delayed updates, navigation may be hampered, or real-time communication may be blocked.

The finding of this study is in line with the study of Michalopoulou et al. (2023), which explored the challenges of food delivery service platforms. The similarity between both studies stems from the fact that they both unearth challenges pertaining to delays and wrong locations. Additionally, the study by Shroff et al. (2022) argued that the challenges facing delivery agents include arriving at the wrong location due to misinformation and untimely deliveries. This aligns significantly with this current study, which found that

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delays on the part of customers and wrong location results from network constraints.

The difference between this current study and the above-mentioned studies is the inclusion of language barrier which is the major contribution of this current study. Another study by Nayeem (2025) investigated factors influencing food delivery business operations. Their study differs from the current study by the inclusion of weather conditions such as rainfall as major constraints for delivery agents in the use of digital food services. Nonetheless, this disparity arises from contextual and geographical differences which result in different weather patterns (rainfall) as well as different literacy rates (language barrier) (Teerakowitkajorn & Tularak, 2020).

Challenges for Food Service Providers Using Digital Food Services

Despite the numerous benefits that digital food services offer, food service providers in the Accra Metropolis face several challenges. These include delayed order processing and communication difficulties with customers. Furthermore, there is the possibility of traffic congestion and incorrect addresses delaying deliveries, which frustrates both service providers and customers (Faheem et al., 2024; Memon et al., 2020). If such challenges prevail over the overall efficiency of digital food services, this is likely to impede the maximum benefits of these platforms. Several challenges were narrated by food service providers who granted me an interview.

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Poor Network

Participants outlined network challenges as impeding the free flow of business within digital food services. Unstable internet connectivity can delay food order processing and the communication chain between food service providers and delivery agents. A classic example is captured below:

> *sometimes the network gets jammed and you can't retrieve the orders you have gotten from the app (SP 1, a 29-year-old food service provider).*

Another one had this to say:

> *Sometimes when you want to reach a delivery agent to come for someone's ordered food and the network is not good, you get frustrated. Sometimes the customers can even cancel the order because you could not deliver on time. Meanwhile, it is not my fault (SP 4, a 23-year-old female food service provider).*

Poor Food Tracking System

Another challenge that emerged as a result of poor networks was difficulty in tracking orders. Food service providers found it difficult to track their orders when they picked from their restaurant. Essentially, food service providers derive joy from seeing their customers receives their orders. Such orders must be tracked when delivered. However, it becomes quite challenging because of the poor network. A food service provider had this to say:

> *.... the tracking when they pick up the food the tablet gives you a notification like delivered. Yeah that is the only tracking system we have, you don't get to know where the food is until it is delivered* (SP 8, a 34-year-old female food service provider).

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Another one had this to say:

> *Sometimes customers complain that they are unable to track their food they ordered at my restaurant. I believe it is a result of poor network and probably the number of deliveries that are made before getting to their turn (SP 6, a 30-year-old male food service provider).*

It could be inferred from the food service providers that tracking deliveries is quite a challenging task. Until the ordered food arrives at the customers' location, the service provider remains concerned.

Fee or Price of Delivery

Charges for deliveries were of great concern to food service providers. Some of the food service providers did not see a reason why their delivery apps had to charge exorbitant prices. One of them had this to say:

> ***…****it doesn't tally because I see no reason why I should sell my food on your app at 60 cedis and take us like 30 percent from the 60 cedis if I don't take that 30 percent too I will not be known I will be using your app and I have to pay for it so long as I'm on your app and these are your terms and condition so if I don't like it I just have to walk out (SP 4, A Restaurant manager).*

Conflict Between Stakeholders

The food service providers and delivery agents sometimes have conflicts over waiting time for food pickup. The providers made the point that the delivery agents are not happy with the waiting time for pickup and this results in a display of anger. The food service providers mentioned that the delivery agents feel their time is wasted when they have to wait momentarily to pick up

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ordered food from the food service providers. One of the food service providers had this to say:

> *... the riders are not friendly especially when they are here to pick up food and we ask them to wait or exercise patience it is as if we have insulted them* (SP 2, a 22-year-old female food service provider).

Another one had this to say:

> *There have been several misunderstandings that have ensued between delivery agents and myself. They feel that they have been delayed because they have several deliveries to do within a short period (SP 4, a 32-year-old female food service provider)*

It could be deduced from the above that delivery agents are likely to have multiple deliveries to be made in the day and, therefore, wasting their time implies a loss of income.

Poor Condition of Food

Customer satisfaction is the service provider's greatest joy; however, in the quest to deliver the best food package, the condition of such foods sometimes turns out to be bad. This could be caused by a delay in delivery due to vehicular traffic and the wrong location on the part of delivery agents. Given this, customers are sometimes disgruntled because of the condition in which their foods are delivered. An interviewee said:

> *There have been times when customers called to complain about the state of food that was delivered to them. Some of the riders don't handle the food well, like pizza…I have been apologising for saa... hmm it's an issue ooo (SP 10, a 27-year-old female food service provider).*

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There are several significant obstacles that digital food services must overcome to operate efficiently and satisfy customers as postulated by participants in this study. One frequent problem as put forward by a participant is the condition of food when it is being delivered. Delays or careless handling during transportation can result in meals that are cold, mushy or broken, which will negatively affect the dining experience. Poor network connectivity can also negatively affect operations, leading to miscommunications between consumers, service providers and delivery personnel, as well as delays in order processing and payment issues.

These findings align with several empirical literature as far as digital food services are concerned (Enz, 2004; Pal & Aradhya, 2020; Udayalakshmi & Sridevi, 2024). Most significantly, the work of Udayalakshmi and Sridevi (2024) stands out as one that highlighted the challenges encountered by service providers with regard to digital food services. The study found that technological issues such as poor telecommunication network and tracking systems greatly inhibit the utilisation of digital food services. This finding is in line with this current study which found the same factors as constraints for service providers. However, this study makes a contribution relative to the study of Udayalakshmi and Sridevi (2024), by emphasising conflict as a significant constraint to the utilisation of digital food services by service providers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the various challenges faced by user of digital food services in Accra. For customers, the biggest complaints were high

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delivery fees, misleading food advertisements; and unreliable internet connections that made it hard to place orders or complete payments. Furthermore, delivery agents, on the other hand, pointed to communication problems caused by language differences, delays from both customers and restaurants, and navigation issues from inaccurate maps. Additionally, they also struggled with poor network coverage, which disrupted their ability to coordinate deliveries. The chapter also elaborated on the fact that food service providers shared similar frustrations. Unreliable internet made it difficult to process orders and reach delivery agents. In addition, the ability to track food after it left the restaurant was another challenge. The high commission fees charged by delivery apps was another challenge. There was also the issue of conflicts between service providers and delivery riders over waiting times. Likewise, there were complaints from customers about the state of food when it arrived. Altogether, these problems impeded the smoothness and reliability of digital food services.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

STAKEHOLDERS' S SATISFACTION AND CONTINUANCE USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICE

Introduction

Stakeholder satisfaction is critical to the success and long-term sustainability of the services offered in the quickly expanding digital food service sector (Humbani et al., 2024). This chapter looks at stakeholders' satisfaction and its implications for their continued usage of digital food services.

Customer Satisfaction with Digital Food Services in Accra Metropolis

The success and sustained patronage of digital food services are largely dependent on the degree of customer satisfaction with the service provided (Sinha et al., 2024). That is to say, customers' satisfaction is greatly impacted by how effectively the service satisfies their expectations, which include seamless, prompt; and efficient service. The themes that emerged from the analysis as factors which contribute to customer satisfaction to DFS are service delivery, preferences of food and effective communication.

Service Delivery

Service delivery refers to efficiently, reliably, and satisfactorily providing goods or services to customers or beneficiaries (Bonfanti et al., 2023). The entire ordering, preparing, and delivering of food to the consumer procedure is referred to as service delivery in the context of digital food

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services. Customers shared their views on the level of satisfaction they gained as far as service delivery was concerned. A verbatim quotation from a participant is below:

> *The satisfaction I get from this digital service food platform errr….hmm…..only God can tell. I don't stress oo it is simple to use and most especially their delivery fee is quite less to afford Everyone can afford it so it was very good. Times to order or operate the app before ordering is very simple* (C9, a 25-year-old female customer).

Another one had this to say:

> *So far so good I can say I am satisfied with the services that these digital food platforms provide. I can say it is convenient, fast, and reliable. At first, I was a bit nervous about patronizing their services for fear of my food not getting to me* (C6, a 26-year-old customer).

It could be said that effective service delivery ensures that customers will continue patronising the services. The quality-of-service delivery depends on several issues such as timely, honest; and prompt delivery. The ultimate goal of any food vendor is to satisfy the needs of the customer while building sustainable relationships and ensuring long-term effectiveness.

Preferences of Food

Customer satisfaction with the preferences of food in digital food services is crucial for ensuring repeat patronage and positive feedback. As long as customers get the options or the kinds of food they order, they are likely to be satisfied with the service provider and the likelihood of buying food from that outfit (Wu et al., 2024). For instance, a customer asserted that:

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> *Food options are very available to choose from once you open the app, the payment side is also in the portal, and you can track your orders and see where the rider has gotten to. All these qualities have influenced my decision to continue using* (C9, a 25-year-old female customer).

Similarly, a customer mentioned her level of satisfaction as far as food preference is concerned:

> *To a larger extent digital food service allows me to choose from a wider range of foods. Even though I usually go for cooked rice and stew, there is also banku and tilapia, fried rice, jollof, ampesi, etc (C7, a 32-year-old male customer).*

Customers frequently make use of digital food services since they provide a range of meals that suit their tastes, dietary requirements, and cultural norms. A digital food platform enhances customer satisfaction when it offers a varied menu that accommodates various preferences. Customers are likely to be satisfied with such services (Ali et al., 2020).

Effective Communication

Being responsive to questions or concerns, providing clear instructions on delivery time and providing timely updates on order status are all examples of effective communication. Customers frequently express their satisfaction by leaving favourable reviews, giving the service higher ratings, and recommending it to others when there is good communication. Below is how a customer commented on effective communication as a factor of satisfaction:

> *Talking about satisfaction yes, I enjoy the satisfaction level of the digital food service because they give me accurate time especially when I am transacting business with them. They give you 30 minutes and when time is up you will hear from*

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them and me this is something I like about the whole bolt foods (C8, a 29-year-old female customer).

It could be said that customers are reassured and feel valued and informed when there is clear and regular communication, which raises their level of satisfaction with the service provided. The analysis pointed out that service delivery, customers' ability to get the preferred food, and effective communication ensured customers' satisfaction with digital food services. This finding implies that delivery that is correct, on time, and efficient must be the priority for digital food services if they want to stay competitive in business. A flawless delivery procedure improves the customer experience in general and increases the likelihood of repeat business. The findings further imply that customers are likely to be satisfied with digital food service when they are provided with a range of food selections which they can conveniently locate and obtain their chosen meals (Ali et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2024). This finding aligns with several empirical studies as far as digital food services are concerned.

For emphasis, the study by Johari et al. (2024) explored factors determining customer satisfaction with food service delivery applications during the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrated that ease of use was the most influential factor, followed by service quality and convenience. These factors were found to directly impact customer satisfaction when using digital food service applications during the pandemic period. To further support the findings of the current study, Talib et al. (2022) investigated factors affecting consumer satisfaction with food delivery services and revealed that customer satisfaction is largely influenced by food quality, consumer convenience, time-saving benefits, and pricing offered by digital food service platforms. The

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findings of the present study align with Talib et al.'s (2022) conclusions. Similarly, customers within the Accra Metropolis reiterated that service quality was a significant factor in determining their level of satisfaction.

Delivery Agents' Satisfaction with Digital Food Services in the Accra Metropolis

Ensuring that delivery agents are satisfied with digital food services is important. This is because they are the channel through which ordered food gets to the customer. Their role is quintessential in the digital food service business. Therefore, their level of satisfaction matters in ensuring constant service. Their continuous delivery to customers, to a large extent, will depend on how reliable and efficient the digital food service is to them. In this section, satisfaction of delivery agents within the Accra Metropolis are measured with flexibility, autonomy of work and daily employment opportunity. Delivery agents shared their views on their satisfaction with digital food services as follows:

Flexibility and Autonomy of Work

Based on the nature of the delivery apps' flexibility and ease of use, delivery agents were satisfied working with them. In an instance where orders are delayed, the service provider will inform the delivery agents of the challenges they are facing. This was a delivery agent's submission:

> ***…****it offers satisfaction because once you place the order within the specific time given to you by the app or service provider, they meet it and in instances where they cannot meet it, they will call you earlier to inform you that they are facing*

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> *challenges so I think in the same way as a rider, it makes my work very easy by tracking the orders and payment options and the rest*…(A7, a 28-year-old male delivery agent).

Another participant had this to say:

> *It is flexible for me as a delivery agent because I am not under any restrictions as to which order to deliver first. However, I look at the route of transportation. For the closer one, I deliver that one first, then followed by the rest (A13, a 27-year-old male delivery agent)*

It could be deduced from the delivery agents that, to a larger extent, they enjoyed flexible terms working with the digital food services within the Accra Metropolis.

Daily Employment Opportunity

Some delivery agents were satisfied with the digital food service because it offered them jobs. A delivery agent asserted that but for the digital food service, he would have been idle.

> *It offers me satisfaction due to the fact that it has provided me with something to be doing and not idling about. There is a saying that the devil finds a job for the idle hands so it is very satisfying to wake up every morning to get something to do because of these digital food services and that is what makes some of us continue to use them (A 13, 27-year-old male delivery agent).*

To buttress the earlier assertion, another delivery agent added that he was satisfied with the digital food services because it allows him to fulfill customer orders without complaints:

> *oh, a lot of satisfaction paaa…..I won't lie to you. So when people order and we act on the orders the only thing we do is to make sure we follow up to see how far with it and if it is*

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> *ready we pick it up and deliver it to the customers and this is very satisfying so far no customer has complained about it so it means they are okay. (A 8, a 27-year-old male delivery agent).*

In sharp contrast, a delivery agent registered his disgruntled position on digital food services:

> *On satisfaction…..hmmmm….I am not the best person to talk about satisfaction because I was not satisfied with their behaviour at all. It is as simple as that. And this cannot convince me to continue using the app….it is not as if I am destroying someone's business or something but some of these service providers are not serious but if they have changed then that's a credit to them… my main reason is that the service app is tough to use… hmmm and on top of that too when there are mistakes the food sellers blame us that we like that* (A 11, a 25-year-old male delivery agent).

Delivery agents' satisfaction with digital food services in Accra largely depended on factors such as the flexibility of the digital apps, and employment opportunities. This means that delivery agents appreciate the ability to manage their schedules and tasks according to their availability and preferences. This is because flexible apps allow agents to choose delivery routes, and handle multiple orders, making their work adaptable to personal needs.

The finding further shows that digital food services provide job opportunities for individuals, especially in a gig economy such as the food industry (Alimo & Zhao, 2018). Many agents value the chance to earn income, whether full-time or part-time, without requiring formal employment (Khan & Aleem, 2014). This is particularly significant in regions with limited formal job opportunities. In Ghana, the informal sector accounts for a significant portion of the country's workforce, providing employment opportunities for millions, particularly the youth (Dadzie et al., 2020). With formal sector jobs

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limited, many young people turn to informal employment avenues to sustain themselves. One of the growing areas within this sector is delivery services, driven largely by the rise of digital food platforms like Glovo, Jumia Foods and Bolt Food (Dadzie et al., 2020; Humbani et al., 2024). These platforms create jobs for young people, offering them flexible work arrangements and income-generating opportunities. Unlike formal jobs, becoming a delivery agent typically requires minimal qualifications and a vehicle such as a motorbike or a bicycle. This lowers barriers to entry for young people, especially those with limited education or formal job experience (Indrayani & Muhammad, 2022).

Food Services Providers' Satisfaction with DFS in the Accra Metropolis

Food service providers are key stakeholders in the digital food service space. Their satisfaction with digital food services could be influenced by several factors, including the type of food prepared by food service providers, the price of food; and the quality of food prepared (Belarmino et al., 2021). Participants shared their level of satisfaction with digital food services.

Order Accuracy

Accurate orders are necessary for a smooth and satisfying consumer experience. Failure to deliver the orders to the right customers can cause annoyance, aggravation and even the loss of business (Robertson, Rotman, McQuilken & Ringer, 2023). Food service providers premised their level of satisfaction with digital food services on the accurate orders they enjoyed. A verbatim quotation from a participant is below:

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> *…as I said earlier, it is very convenient because you are just sitting down and receiving orders and again I am satisfied because the applications bring me more money than I spend to be hosted there (FSP 4, a 29-year-old food service provider).*

Another one had this to say:

> *I have been doing this business for some time now, and I can say that digital online platform helps to have accurate orders. I can imagine not having this platform, there could have been a lot of miscommunications which could easily have led to inaccurate orders from customers but that has not been the case so far (FSP 6, a 35-year-old male food service provider).*

Getting customers satisfied with accurate orders not only boosts business for food service providers but there is also the likelihood that customers would continue to patronise digital food platforms as long as their orders are just as they ordered.

Increase Revenue

Food service providers asserted that revenue increase made them satisfied with digital food services within the Accra Metropolis. Every business venture aims to maximise profit, and this was highlighted by the participants who granted me an interview concerning their satisfaction level.

> *I am very satisfied with digital food service applications and the reasons are that, they are a very efficient way of reaching broader market segments, and more particularly, they have enabled me to increase my revenue levels ever since I joined them (FSP10, 27-year-old female food service provider).*

Another one had this to say:

> *I can say there has been an improvement in my revenue and also gives me the opportunity to get new customers through*

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these apps which have influenced me to continue to use them (FSP6, 33-year-old male food service provider)

The analysis revealed that accurate orders and increase in revenue were the key factors that made food service providers satisfied with digital food services. This implies that accurate orders are likely to lessen the possibility of mistakes, which minimises the requirement for reimbursements, redeliveries; or other adjustments. This increases the effectiveness of operations and helps food service providers save money. Accurate orders also save money by reducing resource waste and improving corporate operations, which boosts profitability (Sinaga & Hermawan, 2023).

Customers' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services

Stakeholders' continuous use of digital food services, especially from the customer's viewpoint, is essential to the industry's growth and viability. Because online platforms offer ease, quickness; and accessibility, customers are encouraged to stick with these services. Customers perceive digital food services to be efficient, varied; and convenient (ease of use, time).

Efficiency

Customers were of the view that their continuous usage of digital food services is dependent on how efficient the services are. They perceived that digital food services were of high quality, that is, being able to accomplish their delivery with the least waste of time and effort. A comment from a customer on DFS efficiency is captured below:

Then again you want to look at the way it is swift when you are ordering food no stress whatsoever so I would say that I will

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> *continue using this platform as far as I am ever ready to order food whether in the house or workplace. There is a lot of food available depending on the restaurant you choose to order from (C8, A 29-year-old female customer).*

The ability to perform tasks with minimal errors but high precision is likely to ensure the continued use of the service being provided. Digital food services have largely demonstrated efficiency by being precise and accurate in their delivery.

Variety

Variety, they say, is the spice of life. Customers were of the view that they had several options with digital food services. There were a lot of restaurants on the digital food service platforms that prepared a variety of foods that customers could easily choose from without much difficulty. Having a lot of options to choose from potentially saves time, as put forward by the customers. This is how a customer put it:

> *It also has a lot of food options available in the restaurant immediately you open the app to choose the meal you want to order and just select your option that's all. It is time-saving. So, I actually will continue using it (C9, 25-year-old female customer).*

Ease of Use

Digital food services would not have been possible without technology. The customers were satisfied with DFS since they perceived that its usage was very simple. One could easily track the order made on the portal and this leads to continual use of the DFS within the Accra Metropolis.

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> *It is very satisfactory too because when it comes to ordering food, the app is very good. You don't do much when placing the orders. Secondly, the tracking of orders is very simple because you can monitor everything on the portal. Everything that is mentioned here is very simple to do on the app so I am satisfied with its performance (C10, 24-years-old female customer).*

The comment made by customer 10 is an indication of their level of satisfaction with digital food service.

Timeliness

Time was another significant motivation for customers to continue the usage of digital food services. Corporate workers need not leave the office during lunchtime. They could easily place orders from the convenience of their offices. The time that they would have used in going to a restaurant to buy could be used for another profitable exercise in their offices. This position is affirmed by a customer who remarked that:

> *So, the digital food service is convenient in that it saves time especially when I am at work. I also think saves me from going out to look for food when I can sit in the comfort of my office and place an order and within a few minutes it's delivered (C6, A 25-year-old female customer).*

The reasons behind customers' continuous use of digital food services include time-saving advantages, variety, efficiency and convenience. Customers can place orders quickly and receive their meals with minimal delays, thanks to the efficiency of these platforms, which overall enhances convenience. Access to a broad array of food selections that suit a range of tastes and preferences is made possible by the variety provided by digital food

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services. Furthermore, repeat usage is encouraged by these platforms' simplicity of use, Finally, consumers looking for faster food delivery solutions find the time-saving feature appealing, which makes digital food services a desirable choice for people with busy schedules.

The study's findings align with the UTAUT proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). According to the UTAUT, social influence, enabling conditions, performance expectancy and effort expectancy all have a direct impact on users' intentions towards a product or service. By extension, consumer preparedness to patronise a service or a product will be predicated upon the above tenets posited by the theory. Performance expectancy as espoused by the theory opines that the continuous usage of a service will depend on the effectiveness and convenience that the customers get from the service. In view of that, the current study finding has shown that customers' continual usage of digital food services platforms was informed by the convenience and efficiency that they enjoyed.

The comparison with Teo et al. (2024) is significant because their quantitative study examined predictors of customers' purchase intention toward food delivery applications, providing a useful benchmark for understanding factors that influence continued usage of digital food services. Specifically, Teo et al. (2024) assessed variables such as perceived ease of use, gender differences, and behavioural intentions, and found that perceived ease of use was the only insignificant predictor of purchase intention.

In contrast, the findings of the current qualitative study indicate that ease of use emerged as a key factor influencing customers' continuous usage of digital food services within the Accra Metropolis. This divergence may be

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explained by differences in methodological orientation and analytical focus. While Teo et al. (2024) relied on structured quantitative measures and accounted for demographic moderators such as gender, the present study employed in-depth qualitative interviews with 12 customers, allowing participants to narratively express how usability shaped their real-life experiences and continued engagement with digital platforms. Thus, the qualitative evidence highlights contextual meanings and practical experiences that may not have been fully captured in the quantitative model.

Beyond ease of use, the current study also revealed that variety offered by digital food service platforms served as a motivating factor for continued patronage among customers in the Accra Metropolis. This finding extends existing literature by emphasising experiential and choice-related dimensions that may not always be operationalised explicitly in quantitative constructs.

Similarly, Lahap et al. (2023) identified performance expectancy as the strongest positive influence on consumers' intention to continually use food delivery applications, followed by social influence. The relevance of this comparison lies in its conceptual alignment with the present study's findings. Participants in this study emphasised the efficiency and reliability of digital platforms as central reasons for their continued patronage, which closely corresponds to the notion of performance expectancy identified in Lahap et al.'s (2023) quantitative analysis. Although the two studies adopt different methodological approaches, both converge on the conclusion that perceived system efficiency plays a critical role in shaping sustained usage behaviour.

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Delivery Agents' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services

This section focuses on the perspectives of delivery agents regarding their continued use of digital food service platforms in the Accra Metropolis. The analysis aimed to identify the key factors influencing their sustained participation in these platforms based on their lived experiences. The findings reveal that delivery agents continue to use digital food service applications mainly due to opportunities for income generation, flexible work schedules, and the ease of using applications to manage delivery tasks. However, participants also highlighted challenges such as slow network access, customer delays, and heavy workloads during peak hours, which sometimes hinder their work experiences. The transcribed data therefore revealed the following themes as the main reasons underpinning delivery agents' continued use of digital food service platforms.

Employment Opportunity

Digital food services offer job opportunities to delivery agents within the Accra Metropolis. Delivery agents are needed to streamline the connection between restaurants and customers with the help of apps like Glovo, Bolt Food; and Hubtel.

> *...and it also creates employment opportunities for many of the youth. Look at the number of us here alone and again it is very easy to access (A1, 23-year-old male delivery agent).....It offers me satisfaction due to the fact that it has provided me with something to be doing and not idling about. There is a saying that the "devil finds a job for the idle hands" so it is very satisfying to wake up every morning to get something to do because of these digital food services and that is what*

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makes some of us continue to use them (A 7, A 29-year-old man).

Delivery agents can choose between full-time or part-time employment, and they can make money through bonuses, tips, and per-delivery incentives. The surge in online meal orders has led to a major increase in the demand for delivery workers, giving people in the Accra Metropolis and beyond a reliable source of money and work.

Flexibility of Work

Another reason delivery agents attributed to the continuous usage of digital food services was their flexible nature. There was much convenience with digital food services because one could sit in the comfort of their home and order food. This is how a delivery agent put it:

> *You see that is how convenient it is. You only sit and wait and someone needs something they request and if you want to go, you accept if not you relax so how is this not convenient or efficient? So, I will say is very convenient as well and efficient because you don't struggle to look for anybody, they look for you rather (A 3, A 26-year-old man)*

The delivery agents' continuous usage of digital food services was influenced by the employment opportunities that they got, and the flexibility they enjoyed in engaging the platform. The flexibility that delivery agents enjoyed from digital food services ensured their continual use of the service (Huang, & Siao, 2023; Chanda, Vafaei-Zadeh, Syafrizal, & Hanifah, 2024). Ideally, no one wants to be stressed by these online services and will therefore be glad to stay with the platform that gives them stress-free services. The digital food services offered employment opportunities to delivery agents, and

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it also gave them the flexibility to work without much stress. The findings highlight that digital food services are critical in offering job opportunities to delivery agents, especially in urban settings like the Accra Metropolis (Tefft, Jonasova, Adjao, & Morgan, 2018).

This emphasises how crucial digital platforms are as a means of generating revenue. It suggests that platforms with consistent job availability, financial stability, and comfortable working environments might be given preference by delivery agents. Therefore, to keep delivery agents on board, the organisations running these platforms need to make sure they provide them with enticing and reliable job opportunities (Tefft et al., 2018). Moreover, delivery agents may be encouraged to stick with digital food platforms because of their flexibility concerning work hours, and delivery schedules (Bannor & Amponsah, 2024). Whether they work full- or part-time, delivery agents may efficiently manage their time when they have flexibility. This implies that for platforms to stay user-friendly and flexible enough to meet the wide range of demands of their workforce, they must constantly innovate and develop.

Food Services Providers' Continuance Usage of Digital Food Services in Accra

Food service companies in Accra have made the continuous usage of digital food services an integral part of their contemporary business operations. These platforms have many advantages, such as improved operating efficiency, expanded market exposure and easier customer order management. Digital food services provide many companies with a

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dependable way to increase client reach and spur revenue growth (Lockett, 2018). However, things like simplicity of use, economic concerns, correct order fulfillment and service quality affect how often they use these platforms.

Increase Sales

An increase in sales is a significant reason for the continuous usage of digital food services by food service providers (Forgtah, 2021). These platforms offer access to a wider customer base, often reaching individuals who prefer the convenience of ordering online. By leveraging digital food services, providers can expand their market beyond walk-in customers, resulting in higher sales volumes.

> *I think I will continue to use the digital food services platform because it has increased my sales. Customers who use digital platforms to order food are a lot as compared than walk-in customers. Before patronizing the online service my customer base wasn't much but now I can say the sales have increased* (FSP3, a 26-year-old female food service provider).

Another food service provider added that:

> *Ever since I started engaging or using digital food platforms my sales have increased astronomically. Without going anywhere to market or advertise my food, the platforms give me a huge platform, and that has resulted in an increase in sales* (FSP2, a 22-year-old female food service provider).

For food service providers, the potential for increased sales is a significant motivation for continuously using digital food platforms. These platforms expand the customer base beyond the traditional walk-in clientele, providing access to a broader, more diverse audience. By leveraging

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technology, food providers can reach customers who prefer the convenience of online ordering, thereby increasing revenue streams.

Convenience

Food service businesses consistently use digital food services because they are convenient. By streamlining the ordering procedure, these systems enable suppliers to effectively handle orders without requiring frequent phone conversations or in-person interactions. Restaurants may operate more efficiently and save time by automating order tracking, payment processing and customer service. A comment from a participant is captured below:

> *Based on the submissions so far it is very convenient for me and I think I will continue to use the digital food service platforms to render service to my customers. It is very swift to use especially with bolt, I will say because the interface is designed in simple terms it makes it easy to use, so therefore, I will continue to use it (FSP11, a 28-year-old female food service provider)*

Digital food services provide the convenience of reaching a broader customer base without the need for extensive marketing efforts, contributing to the providers' desire to continue using such platforms.

Visibility

Visibility is a key factor for food service providers' continuous usage of digital food services. By being listed on popular platforms, these businesses gain significant exposure to a larger, more diverse audience than they might through traditional means. Digital food services provide an online marketplace

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where customers can easily discover various restaurants and food options, giving providers a competitive edge.

> *Digital food services have shed lamp light on my business. Today, we are all over the greater Accra Metropolis and beyond. The digital apps have marketed us to a broader customer base. A lot of people have gotten to know us through the digital platform (FSP2, a 22-year-old female food service provider).*

This enhanced visibility leads to increased brand awareness, customer reach, and, ultimately, more orders. For food service providers, maintaining a presence on these platforms is crucial for sustaining growth and staying competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace. From the narrative, food service providers continuous usage of digital platforms was premised on increased sales, convenience, and visibility. This finding suggests that food service providers' revenue can be significantly increased by using digital platforms since they give them access to a wider client base. This emphasises how crucial digital platforms are to the business plans of food service providers and implies businesses should keep using digital technologies to increase profits (Adzovie & Jibril, 2020; Ngah et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the finding brings to light that digital food platforms are convenient, as they streamline ordering procedures and increase operational efficiency (Samsudin et al., 2022). This proves that technology improves service delivery for customers and businesses alike (Bannor & Amponsah, 2024). This suggests that to save time and effort when handling customers' requests, food service providers are likely to give preference to systems with intuitive user interfaces and strong logistical assistance. Finally, the finding implies that digital platforms provide food service providers with increased

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visibility, which expands their reach and increases brand recognition (Belarmino et al., 2021; Chakraborty et al., 2024). This implies that food companies believe having an online presence is important for staying competitive. Food companies may need to make investments in digital marketing and continue to actively participate on these platforms to experience sustainable growth and remain visible in the crowded market.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how satisfied different stakeholders are with digital food services and the factors that ensures the continue to use DFS. For customers, satisfaction often came down to how smooth the delivery process was, how easy it was to find the food they wanted, and whether communication was clear throughout the order. They also mentioned speed, convenience and variety the apps offered as measures of satisfaction. Delivery agents found the platforms appealing mainly because of the flexibility and the steady work it provided. Still, a few had concerns, especially around unfair treatment and system glitches. Food service providers, on the other hand, valued the accuracy of orders and the noticeable boost in sales that came from reaching more customers. The chapter shows that reliability, ease and economic opportunity are central to keeping stakeholders engaged in Accra's digital food ecosystem.

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CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study. Conclusions drawn from the major findings are also presented in the chapter. Based on the findings, the chapter additionally highlights recommendations on practice and policy as well as contributions made to the body of knowledge on stakeholders' experiences with digital food services. Finally, areas are recommended for further research.

Summary of the Study

The use of digital food services by individual stakeholders are increasing due to the advancement of technology and the convenience associated with it in the Ghanaian context. It is evident in literature (Buncaras et al., 2022; Ganapathi & Abu-Shanab, 2020; Hussien & Mansour, 2020) that arguably, there has been less focus on other notable stakeholders like food service providers and delivery agents. There are limited studies that holistically examine the experiences of the various stakeholders in DFS. Consequently, the study sought to asses stakeholders' experiences with digital food services in the Accra Metropolis.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Explore the underlying motivations driving the adoption of Digital Food Services (DFS) among various stakeholders in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.

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2. Examine stakeholders' experiences with DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.
3. Assess the constraints experienced by stakeholders in the utilisation of DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.
4. Investigate the factors influencing stakeholders continued use of DFS in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana.

The study was underpinned by the UTAUT. The components of this theory provided the variables adopted in the study. In addition to this, the study developed a conceptual framework, which provided a valuable guide to asses stakeholders' experiences with digital food services in the Accra Metropolis. This framework was integrative in nature, drawing on and synthesising insights from the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), and UTAUT. A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. Customers, delivery agents and food service providers (stakeholders) within the Accra Metropolis served as the population for the study. Through a convenient and snowball sampling technique, 38 participants were selected for the study. IDIs were the data collection methods used. With the aid of three separate IDI guides, data were collected from a total of 38 study participants (stakeholders). Out of this number, 12 of them were customers engaged in DFS, 13 were delivery agents who were not affiliated to any food service facility and the remaining 13 were food service providers who uses DFS platforms in the Accra Metropolis.

Pretesting of the research instruments was done in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana in October, 2023. This was followed up with the actual data collection in the Accra Metropolis from 18th

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December to 18th February, 2023. The IDIs were transcribed verbatim and the texts were organised and analysed thematically based on Braun and Clarke's (2013) six steps of the qualitative data analysis procedure. The interpretation of the findings was done within the context of field notes and personal reflections of the researcher during the data collection period. The findings were presented using a narrative approach. This involved the use of direct quotations from the text to support the findings and discussions.

Summary of Major Findings

The following is a summary of the major findings of this study. With respect to the first objective, it was found that customers are motivated to use Digital Food Services (DFS) due to ease of use, timely and reliable delivery, social status and privacy considerations, as well as food accessibility and variety. The platforms were perceived as simple, efficient, and convenient, enabling customers to obtain preferred meals quickly while avoiding public queues and maintaining discretion. Furthermore, the study discovered that delivery agents are motivated to engage in DFS because of flexible working conditions, reliable and transparent payment structures, employment opportunities, and the overall efficiency of the digital platforms.

For many agents, DFS serves both as a livelihood strategy and as a source of autonomy within the gig economy. In addition, the study found that food service providers are motivated to adopt DFS as a result of opportunities for market expansion, revenue growth, operational efficiency, and the convenience associated with user-friendly digital systems. Overall, ease of use, timeliness, and economic benefits emerged as common motivating factors

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across all stakeholder groups, indicating that DFS adoption in the Accra Metropolis is influenced by technological, socio-economic, and performance-related considerations.

With regard to the second objective, it was found that stakeholders' experiences with Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis are multidimensional, encompassing effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and emotional response. For customers, effectiveness was reflected in successful order placement, accurate delivery, customisation options, and responsive complaint management, while efficiency was associated with ease of navigation, speed of delivery, and real-time tracking features. Customer satisfaction was largely influenced by service quality, packaging, timeliness, and overall professionalism, with emotional responses shaped by trust, confidence, or frustration depending on service performance.

Furthermore, the study revealed that delivery agents experienced effectiveness through accurate order notifications, reliable payment confirmations, and correct customer locations, whereas efficiency was linked to GPS accuracy, route optimisation, and timely alerts. Their satisfaction depended on system clarity, prompt payments, and smooth coordination, although network challenges occasionally affected their experience. In addition, food service providers experienced effectiveness through accurate order transmission and efficient complaint handling, while efficiency was enhanced by real-time synchronisation between the platform, restaurant, and delivery agents. Their satisfaction was tied to operational ease, swift communication, and reduced workflow disruptions. Overall, effective communication, system responsiveness, and accuracy emerged as cross-

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cutting experiential enablers across all stakeholder groups, confirming that DFS performance in Accra is best understood as a multidimensional service experience rather than merely a functional technological system.

For the third objective, it was found that stakeholders encounter several constraints in using Digital Food Services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis, and these challenges vary across customers, delivery agents, and food service providers. For customers, the key constraints include high delivery charges, perceived deception in food presentation, and poor internet connectivity, with high fees viewed as disproportionate to food prices and discrepancies between advertised images and actual meals creating dissatisfaction and distrust. Poor network connectivity also disrupts payment processes and order placement, often resulting in frustration and cancelled transactions. The study further revealed that delivery agents face language barriers, delays from customers and restaurants, incorrect delivery locations, and unstable network connectivity. Language differences complicate communication, while preparation delays and slow customer responses reduce efficiency and earnings.

Inaccurate map directions and wrong addresses lead to wasted time, additional fuel costs, and reduced delivery volumes, and network disruptions interfere with navigation and payment confirmations. In addition, food service providers experience constraints such as poor internet connectivity, limited tracking systems, high commission charges, conflicts with delivery agents over waiting times, and complaints regarding food condition upon delivery. Unstable connections hinder order retrieval and coordination, limited tracking reduces operational visibility, and high commissions lower profit margins.

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Conflicts and delivery-related complaints further affect service quality and customer satisfaction. Overall, technological, economic, and operational challenges cut across all stakeholder groups, indicating that despite the convenience and efficiency of DFS platforms, infrastructural limitations, cost concerns, coordination gaps, and communication barriers continue to undermine their optimal performance in the Accra Metropolis.

The findings of the fourth objective revealed that stakeholders' satisfaction and continuance usage of digital food services (DFS) in the Accra Metropolis are driven by performance, convenience, and economic benefits. Customers' satisfaction was primarily influenced by efficient service delivery, availability of preferred food options, effective communication, timeliness, ease of use, and variety, all of which encouraged their continued patronage. Delivery agents' satisfaction and sustained engagement were largely shaped by flexible working conditions, employment opportunities, and the relative ease of using the platforms, although some reported operational and technical challenges. Food service providers' satisfaction and continuous usage were mainly motivated by order accuracy, increased sales, enhanced visibility, and operational convenience. Overall, reliability, efficiency, flexibility, and revenue generation emerged as the key factors sustaining stakeholder participation in the digital food service ecosystem in the Accra Metropolis.

Conclusion

This study examined stakeholders' motivations, experiences, constraints, satisfaction, and continuance usage of Digital Food Services (DFS) within the Accra Metropolis. The findings demonstrate that DFS

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adoption and sustained engagement are influenced by an interplay of technological, socio-economic, and performance-related factors. Across all stakeholder groups—customers, delivery agents, and food service providers—ease of use, timeliness, efficiency, and economic benefits emerged as central drivers of participation in the digital food ecosystem.

For customers, DFS platforms are valued for their convenience, privacy, accessibility, and variety, with satisfaction strongly linked to service delivery quality, effective communication, and system reliability. Delivery agents perceive DFS as both an income-generating opportunity and a flexible work arrangement within the gig economy, though their experiences are moderated by infrastructural and coordination challenges. Food service providers benefit from market expansion, increased revenue, order accuracy, and operational convenience, which collectively reinforce their continued use of digital platforms.

Importantly, the study establishes that stakeholders' experiences are multidimensional, extending beyond mere technological functionality to include emotional responses, relational coordination, and value co-creation. However, infrastructural limitations (such as poor internet connectivity), economic concerns (including high commissions and delivery fees), and operational inefficiencies (such as inaccurate locations and communication barriers) constrain optimal platform performance.

In a nutshell, the sustainability of DFS in the Accra Metropolis depends not only on technological efficiency but also on the alignment of stakeholder expectations, economic fairness, infrastructural support, and effective coordination mechanisms. The study therefore contributes to theory

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and practice by demonstrating that DFS success is embedded within a broader socio-technical and service ecosystem.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study offers core empirical evidence on various themes surrounding the motivation, effectiveness, challenges, satisfaction; and continued use of digital food services (DFS) among important players in the Accra Metropolis. This adds to the body of knowledge already available on the subject area. From a theoretical perspective, the study presents a holistic framework that is relevant in the literature for exploring the interrelationships between motivation, effectiveness, constraints, satisfaction; and continued use of digital food services (DFS). Arguably, such a framework, which is best suited for the dynamics of an urban setting, is lacking in the literature.

Furthermore, the study advances knowledge of the motivations behind DFS adoption among stakeholders. The study advances understanding of the factors that motivate DFS participation by identifying important motivators. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on the motivations behind the use of digital food services, especially within the context of urban food delivery ecosystems. The results of the study also offer a localised view on relevant assessment parameters for how stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of DFS. The study also offers knowledge on the limitations that DFS ecosystem stakeholders must contend with, and this is a key aspect to consider in order to enhance DFS. As such, this contribution is very relevant to the improvement of DFS platforms to offer stakeholders more satisfaction.

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The study also offers knowledge on the critical elements that contribute to favourable user satisfaction. As such, the study increases our understanding of stakeholder satisfaction. The study offers practical insights for enhancing digital food service operations by illustrating that stakeholder satisfaction is driven by factors such as food preferences, revenue growth, order accuracy, employment flexibility, and service quality. In addition to this, the study adds to knowledge by identifying elements that promote prolonged engagement. Based on this, the literature can take targeted steps to explore strategies for maintaining digital food service platforms in urban markets and other relevant contexts.

Contribution to Practice

Fundamentally, given the varied themes that have emerged from the study, it is evident that there is a need to focus uniquely on each stakeholder in practice. Therefore, based on the findings, practitioners gain valuable insight into the factors which motivate each class of stakeholder in using DFS. Hence, even though the customers are a focal point in the DFS sector, the knowledge offered by this study is beneficial for DFS platforms to adjust the operational flow and practical design of their platforms to factor the motivations behind the use of DFS for each stakeholder.

Moreover, the outcome of the study on the measure of effectiveness of DFS is significant to practice, particularly because it provides knowledge on the specific adjustments to make on the metrics of performance and productivity across the DFS platforms. Given that each stakeholder views the measure of effectiveness of DFS differently, adjustments can be made to

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incorporate this knowledge instead of continuously using a one-size-fits-all measure of performance.

Furthermore, the research offers practitioners evidence on the measure of satisfaction for various stakeholders. This ensures that they can develop targeted strategies to ensure that the various stakeholders of the DFS value chain are satisfied. These platforms can, therefore, implement holistic strategies that will satisfy each class of stakeholder, rather than focusing solely on customer satisfaction as evident in past literature. As such, efforts to increase customer satisfaction can concurrently focus on agent job security, food provider revenue and customer service expectations.

For practitioners, in order for DFS to thrive, there should be continued use of the service. This is most important for the survival of DFS platforms. Indeed, past effort has been focused significantly on customers. However, as this study shows, all stakeholders have relevant input which needs consideration. Therefore, the findings regarding the factors that enhance continued use of the service will enable practitioners to institute strategic policy that ensures that each stakeholder continuously makes use of DFS irrespective of the challenges that they may intermittently encounter.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and stakeholder satisfaction of digital food services in the Accra Metropolis. Such an initiative could be undertaken by the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) in collaboration with the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and National Communication

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Authority (NCA). For digital food service platforms, it is recommended that system reliability and infrastructure integration be improved through investment in stronger server capacity, GPS precision, and real-time tracking systems. Such enhancements would reduce delivery inaccuracies and coordination gaps, thereby improving service efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Additionally, pricing and commission structures should be reviewed to ensure fairness and sustainability for both customers and food service providers. Transparent fee structures are likely to enhance trust and encourage long-term platform participation. Communication systems should also be strengthened by introducing automated multilingual support features, improved notification mechanisms, and structured complaint-resolution systems to facilitate effective stakeholder interaction and problem resolution. Furthermore, quality assurance mechanisms must be reinforced, particularly in relation to food presentation accuracy and packaging standards, to minimise customer dissatisfaction and enhance service credibility. Continuous training for delivery agents and vendors on platform usage, customer service, and dispute resolution is also recommended to improve overall service quality and operational coordination.

For food service providers, investment in improved packaging solutions is essential to maintain food quality during transit and reduce complaints regarding food condition upon delivery. Accurate menu representation practices, including clear photographic depictions and honest descriptions of food offerings, should be adopted to minimise expectation–performance gaps and build consumer trust. Collaboration between food

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service providers and delivery agents should also be strengthened to reduce operational conflicts and waiting-time disputes, thereby improving delivery efficiency and service satisfaction. For delivery agents, participation in periodic training on customer communication, navigation systems, and platform updates is recommended to enhance professional competence and service reliability. Additionally, the formation of associations or representative groups could facilitate structured dialogue with platform operators on issues such as welfare, payment structures, and dispute resolution, promoting fair working conditions and operational stability.

From a policy perspective, it is recommended that policymakers prioritise digital infrastructure development, particularly reliable internet connectivity in urban commercial areas, to support the operational efficiency of digital food platforms. Regulatory frameworks should also be developed to address labour protection in the gig economy, commission transparency, and platform accountability, ensuring fair and sustainable working conditions for delivery agents and service providers. Furthermore, policies that encourage digital entrepreneurship and support small and medium-sized food enterprises in integrating digital platforms are likely to stimulate economic growth and innovation within the sector. Such measures will strengthen the digital food service ecosystem and promote inclusive participation across stakeholders.

Suggestions for Further Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into digital food services in the Accra Metropolis, several avenues remain open for future research. Quantitative validation studies are recommended to statistically

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examine the relationships among motivation, satisfaction, and continuance usage using methods such as structural equation modelling. Such studies would provide empirical generalisability and deepen understanding of behavioural determinants in digital service adoption. Comparative regional studies across different metropolitan areas in Ghana or other African cities could also reveal contextual variations in digital food service adoption and stakeholder experiences, contributing to broader theoretical and practical insights.

Longitudinal studies are further recommended to assess how stakeholder perceptions and satisfaction evolve over time as digital platforms mature and infrastructural conditions improve. This would provide valuable evidence on the sustainability of digital food services and the dynamic nature of user experiences. Gender and socio-demographic analyses could explore how factors such as gender, income, education, and occupational status influence digital food service adoption and continuance behaviour, thereby informing targeted interventions and inclusive service design. Additionally, research on platform governance and labour conditions is necessary to investigate issues of gig work precarity, income stability, and regulatory frameworks, which are critical to the long-term sustainability of delivery agents' livelihoods.

Future studies may also explore technology and innovation dimensions, including the role of artificial intelligence, predictive logistics, digital payment systems, and algorithmic management in enhancing digital food service efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction. Finally, environmental and sustainability-focused research is warranted to examine the ecological

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implications of digital food delivery, particularly issues related to packaging waste, carbon emissions, and sustainable logistics practices. Such investigations would contribute to the development of environmentally responsible and socially sustainable digital food ecosystems.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Profile of Interviewees/Study Participants

A. Customers' Engaged in DFSs

Code	Sex	Age	Level of education	Religion	Marital status	Employment status
C1	F	20-26	T	Christianity	Single	NSP
C2	F	20-25	T	Muslim	Single	Unemployed
C3	F	20-25	T	Christianity	Single	NSP
C4	M	20	T	Christianity	Single	Student
C5	F	28	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
C6	F	25	T	Christianity	Single	Unemployed
C7	M	32	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
C8	F	29	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
C9	F	25	T	Christianity	Single	Unemployed
C10	F	24	T	Christianity	Single	Unemployed
C 11	M	35	T	Muslim	Married	Employed
C 12	M	20-25	S	Christianity	Single	Unemployed

Source: Field survey (Bampoe-Addy, 2025)

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B. Delivery Agents Engaged in DFSs

A1	M	23	JHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A2	M	27	SHS	Traditionist	Single	Employed
A3	M	26	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A4	M	20-25	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A5	M	25-30	JHS	Atheist	Single	Employed
A6	M	25-30	SHS	Muslim	Single	Employed
A7	M	32	T	Christianity	Married	Employed
A8	M	28	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A9	M	28	T	Christianity	Married	Employed
A10	M	25-30	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A11	M	25-30	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A12	M	20-25	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
A13	M	27	JHS	Christianity	Single	Employed

Source: Field survey (Bampoe-Addy, 2025)

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Food services Providers' Engaged in DFSs

FSP1	F	29	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP2	F	22	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP3	F	25-30	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP4	F	20-25	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP5	M	26	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP6	M	30-35	T	Christianity	Married	Employed
FSP7	F	30	SHS	Christianity	Married	Employed
FSP8	F	34-40	-	-	Single	Employed
FSP9	-	20-25	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP10	F	27	SHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP11	F	28	JHS	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP12	F	25	T	Christianity	Single	Employed
FSP13	M	30-35	T	Christianity	Married	Employed

Source: Field survey (Bampoe-Addy, 2025)

NSP=National Service Personnel. C =Customers. A=Delivery Agents, FSP= Food Service Providers. Sex: F= Female, M= Male. Educational Level: JHS = Junior High School, SHS = Senior High School, VOC= Vocational, T = Tertiary.

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APPENDIX B

IN- DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAKEHOLDERS'

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

Dear Respondents,

This interview guide is designed to solicit information on **"Motivation, Challenges and Satisfaction Regarding Stakeholders' Use of Digital Food Services in the Accra Metropolis, Ghana".** Please note that stakeholders, in this study include customers, food service providers, and delivery agents. And experience for the purpose of this study is conceptualised as convenience (effort expectancy, thus degree of ease of use considering one's place, time, and comfort in execution), effectiveness (performance expectancy, thus how DFS makes one perform better), and constraints (something that hinders the use of a DFS apps/site after their initial acceptance) This research is part of the academic requirements for the award of a PhD. The information provided is solely for academic purposes only and your anonymity is guaranteed. The researcher wishes to assure you of the confidentiality of the information you provide. I will be very grateful if you could spare some minutes of your time to have a schedule interview which would be audio recorded. For further information, please contact Rhoda Bampoe-Addy on phone number 024-4052342 or email on rhodabampoeaddy @yahoo.com.

Thank you.
Rhoda Nancy Ashia Bampoe-Addy (PhD Candidate)

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CUSTOMERS USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES

Demographic Characteristics:

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself? (probe for age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and employment status.

Customers Motivation with the Use of Digital Food Services

2. Which type of app do you prefer or use and why? (Probe to find out if they've used others before. And why did they stop using it or prefer the current one better)
3. How do you understand by convenience of digital food service in terms of app accessibility and usability? (Probe for user accessibility, friendliness of digital food service applications. minutes taken to respond to orders and whether they deliver on time or not)

Customers Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. In your opinion, how effective are digital food service applications in terms of ease of communication and interaction with food service providers? (Probe for personal experiences, interactivity of App, prompts, food options availability, timely responses and feedbacks)

Customers Challenges with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. Could you share some of the challenges you face using digital food service transactions (Probe further for network connectivity, difficulty to open app or function properly, notification and communication constraints)
2. Could you explain, some of your experiences in terms of the discrepancies between app prices and actual delivery charges, along with the inclusion of extra fees (probe for personal experience on price differences, additional charges after ordering, that affected the perceived value of using the app)
3. Could you tell us your experience on delay in delivery, how it affected your plans, leading to inconvenience and additional costs associated with your waiting (probe for personal experience)
4. Finally, kindly share economic challenges you face as a customer in using digital food service? (Probe again for various factors related to costs, pricing, and other financial transactions)

1. What are some of the challenges that primarily revolve around your communication and navigation through digital food service applications? (Probe for further explanations on how they occurred)

Recommendations

In your own view, what should be done to improve and better manage the digital food service process.

DELIVERY AGENTS' USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICE

Demographic Characteristics:

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself? (probe for age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and employment status.

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Delivery Agent's Motivation with the Use of Digital Food Services

Which type of app do you prefer or use and why? (Probe to find out if they've used others before. And why did they stop using it or prefer the current one better)

3. How do you understand by convenience of digital food service in terms of app accessibility and usability? (Probe for user accessibility, friendliness of digital food service applications. minutes taken to respond to orders and real-time order updates)

5. Are digital food service applications helpful and convenient in terms of easy transactions with customers and food service providers? (Probe for convenience in digital payment options and any others)

Delivery Agents Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. In your opinion, how effective are digital food service applications in terms of ease of communication and interaction with customers and food service providers? (Probe for personal experiences, timely responses and feedbacks for effective performance)
2. Are digital food service applications effective in providing detailed food options, reflecting a broader trend in the digital era? (Probe for personal experience)

Delivery Agents Challenges with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. Could you share some of the difficulties in maintaining a stable internet connection due to location or from network provider while using tracking technology (GPS, Google map etc).
2. Could you elaborate on the challenges you face as a delivery agent in managing multiple orders simultaneously, (Probe further for issues of traffic in handling ordering of food by customers)
3. Could you explain some of your challenges in terms of the inconsistencies between app prices and actual delivery charges, along with the inclusion of extra fees (probe for personal experience on price differences, additional charges after ordering, that affected the value of using the app from customers)
4. Could you tell us your experiences on delay in delivery, how it affected your plans, leading to inconvenience and additional costs associated to your delivery to customers (probe for personal experience)
5. Could you elaborate on how the surge in fuel prices reflected in your delivery prices. (Probe to find out how it cost in management and maintaining an economically viable service affected the prices on your delivery)
6. Finally, kindly share economic challenges you face as an agent? (probe again for various factors related to costs, pricing, and financial transactions)
7. Could you tell us some of the social challenges you face as an agent primarily revolving around customer interactions (Probe for language barriers).
8. Kindly share with us as an agent on safety issues, including accidents and crime-prone areas that posed social challenges.

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9. What were some of the social challenges you faced with customers and food service providers? (Probe for instances where customers and food service providers were not socially friendly and their comments were not appealing).

Recommendations

In your own view, what should be done to improve and better manage the digital food service process.

FOOD SERVICE PROVIDERS USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES

Demographic Characteristics:

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself? (probe for age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and employment status.

Food Service Providers Motivation with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. Which type of app do you prefer or use and why? (Probe to find out if they've used others before. And why did they stop using it or prefer the current one better)
2. How convenient are you in terms of ease of access to digital food service operations? (Probe for personal experiences)
3. Kindly share how convenient you are in terms of time efficiency of digital food service (probe to know various ways digital food applications have ensured convenience in time efficiency, order accuracy, delivery of quick responses, and reactiveness to fixing any issues)
4. What will you have to say about some of the responses on your convenience of food service providers in relation to digital payment facilitation?

Food Service Providers Effectiveness with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. In your opinion, how effective are digital food service applications in terms of easy and user friendly, as well as helping achieve your performance? (Probe for personal experiences)
2. How have the tracking features on digital food service apps been vital for efficient order management?
3. Could you share with me how app's user interface has enhanced the effectiveness of your communication and customer experience.

Food Service Providers Challenges with the Use of Digital Food Services

1. Kindly share with us some challenges faced in terms of network connectivity issues in relation digital food service operations (probe to know the unique technological challenges they face on network with personal experience)
2. What are some challenges that you faced in operation and training new employees on how to use digital food service applications for tracking orders? (Probe for personal experience)

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3. kindly share economic constraints you faced as a food service provider? (probe again for various factors related to costs, pricing, and financial transactions)
4. Kindly share any other economic constraints you faced during your digital food service operations.
5. What challenges do you face through the digital food service applications? (Probe for managing customer complaints, food ordering, such as group orders)
6. How does the use of digital food service applications impact the relationship between delivery agents and customers, and what challenges arise in managing that dynamic effectively?
7. What constraints do you face in terms of managing the social implications of reviews or feedback on the digital platforms, and how do you address potential negative impacts on your reputation?

Recommendations

In your own view, what should be done to improve and better manage the digital food service process.

STAKEHOLDERS CONTINUE USAGE OF DIGITAL FOOD SERVICES

1. Could you kindly share how convenience and efficiency of digital food service applications influence you to continue using applications in transactions? (in probing consider areas like efficiency and convenience in saving time and effort by providing quick access to a variety of food options, time-saving aspect of ordering, and ease in performance)
2. How does digital food service offer service satisfaction to you and kindly tell us how this satisfaction influences your decision to continue to use digital food service? (Probe satisfaction in areas like ordering, delivery, tracking orders, payment options, and how these influences continue usage of digital food services)

3. Kindly tell us your past experiences that influence your decision to continue using digital food service.

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