

A Single Case Study on How Customer Reviews Shape Brand Trust and Ordering Decision in Fast-Food Delivery Applications

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Abstract

This qualitative single-case study explored how online customer reviews influence brand trust and ordering decisions among users of fast-food delivery applications. Data were collected through in-depth focus group discussions with active users of fast-food delivery applications and were analyzed thematically. Five interrelated themes emerged from the findings: (1) Convenience as an Entry Point to Digital Food Consumption, which identified convenience as the primary motivator for adopting food delivery applications; (2) Online Reviews as Cognitive Shortcuts in Restaurant Evaluation and Decision Filters, which revealed that consumers use reviews to simplify restaurant selection and reduce information overload; (3) Trust Formation and Erosion Through Review Consistency, which demonstrated that review credibility, authenticity, consistency, and business responsiveness shape consumers' trust in restaurants and delivery platforms; (4) Risk Aversion and Defensive Decision-Making Behavior, which showed that previous negative experiences increase perceived risk and strengthen consumers' reliance on online reviews as a protective mechanism; and (5) Interaction of Reviews with Economic Incentives and Visual Validation, which highlighted that reviews are evaluated alongside promotional offers, pricing, customer-uploaded photographs, service quality, and delivery performance before consumers finalize purchasing decisions. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that online customer reviews function not only as sources of social proof but also as mechanisms for trust development, perceived risk reduction, and informed decision-making within digital food delivery environments. The study concludes that transparent review systems, authentic customer-generated content, consistent service quality, and responsive customer engagement are essential to strengthening brand trust and encouraging repeat purchasing.

Keywords: Brand Trust, Fast-Food Application, Online Customer Reviews, Ordering Decision, Single-Case Study.

1. Introduction

Online food delivery applications have become part of everyday consumption, changing how people access, evaluate, and purchase food. On these platforms, online customer reviews play a crucial role, serving as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) that shapes how consumers perceive service quality, product reliability, and overall brand credibility. Previous studies have shown that review characteristics such as valence, volume, argument quality, usefulness,



and credibility significantly influence purchase intentions, while negative reviews can substantially reduce purchase probability and redirect consumers toward alternative products (Varga & Albuquerque, 2023). At the same time, the continued growth of digital platforms has made user-generated content even more influential, as consumers increasingly rely on reviews, social media, and online feedback when making decisions (Bivona, 2022).

The expansion of online food delivery services is also closely linked to convenience, accessibility, and the growing use of digital payments, which have made these platforms more embedded in daily routines (Danekula, 2025). However, despite the increasing number of studies on this topic, most rely on quantitative approaches. As a result, there is still a limited understanding of how consumers actually interpret and use reviews in real-life situations where decisions are made quickly. From the data gathered in this study, it became evident that reviews are not only sources of information but also quick decision-making tools, especially when consumers face many options. In the Philippine context, this becomes even more relevant, as online reviews often serve as a primary basis for trust, particularly when consumers are unsure about a brand or service. Beyond individual decision-making, these behaviors also connect to broader issues such as responsible consumption, health choices, and environmental impact.

Given these observations, this study focuses on how consumers interpret online customer reviews and how these interpretations influence trust and ordering decisions in fast-food delivery applications. Specifically, it examines how factors such as sentiment, credibility, level of detail, and recency of reviews shape consumer behavior. In the Philippine context, online reviews are particularly influential, serving as a primary source of social proof that builds or erodes trust in both platforms and partner restaurants. Furthermore, these digital interactions extend beyond economic behavior and intersect with broader societal outcomes, including responsible consumption (SDG 12), health-related choices (SDG 3), and environmental sustainability (SDG 13). Given these dynamics, this study aims to explore how consumers interpret online customer reviews and how these interpretations shape brand trust and ordering decisions within a fast-food delivery application.

Considering this context, the current study aims to investigate the meaning consumers make of internet customer reviews and the meaning of these interpretations for brand trust and ordering in fast food delivery apps. Specific attributes, like sentiment, credibility, level of detail, ratings, customer photos, and recency, and contextual factors, like previous experience, perceived risk, convenience, pricing, promotions, perceived service quality, and visual validation are reviewed. As the Philippines is a market where consumers are assessing delivery platforms and their partner restaurants, these interactions are especially relevant, as online reviews can become significant social proof.

This study addresses five research questions. First, it examines how consumers interpret and evaluate online customer reviews when deciding whether to order from a fast-food delivery application. Second, it investigates how online customer reviews contribute to the formation or erosion of consumer trust toward fast-food delivery platforms and their partner restaurants. Third, it explores how specific review attributes, including sentiment, credibility, level of detail, ratings, customer photos, and recency, shape consumers' ordering decisions. Fourth, it considers how consumers' previous experiences and perceived risks influence their reliance on online customer reviews when making ordering decisions. Finally, it examines how contextual factors such as convenience, pricing, promotions, perceived service quality, and visual validation interact with online customer reviews in shaping consumers' ordering decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Research

2.1.1. Online Customer Review

Online customer reviews play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing behavior by functioning as modern word-of-mouth communication. Positive reviews enhance customer trust and loyalty, while negative reviews can significantly discourage potential buyers from engaging with a service (Bandekar & Bhatia, 2025). Reviews also provide valuable insights into both product quality and service performance, including delivery speed, packaging condition, and transaction efficiency, which collectively shape overall brand perception (Teichert et al., 2008). Furthermore, sentiment analysis studies indicate that customer satisfaction is often expressed through positive emotional language. In contrast, dissatisfaction is typically associated with complaints about delays or poor quality, offering actionable insights for service improvement (Adak et al., 2022).

2.1.2. Consumer Interpretation of Online Reviews

Consumers assess the quality, credibility, usefulness, and relevance of review information to reduce uncertainty and make informed purchasing decisions. Research indicates that consumers frequently rely on easily accessible review ratings as cognitive heuristics that simplify decision-making, particularly under time constraints or when review information is inconsistent (Zhang et al., 2024). Beyond star ratings, consumers also consider reviewer identity, review format, and platform design as decision filters that help minimize information overload and facilitate restaurant selection (Pocchiari et al., 2023). Moreover, consumers process overall ratings and detailed textual reviews differently: overall ratings support rapid evaluations, whereas detailed reviews become increasingly valuable for assessing experience-based products such as food (Jin et al., 2023). However, excessive review information may overwhelm consumers, highlighting the importance of well-designed review systems that support efficient information processing and informed ordering decisions (Seutter et al., 2023).

2.1.3. Brand Trust

Brand trust is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of consumer loyalty and long-term engagement in digital platforms. Electronic trust (e-trust) has been shown to mediate the relationship between service attributes such as security, privacy, and reliability and consumers' willingness to transact online (Zaheer et al., 2024). Additionally, social media attributes such as interactivity and informativeness significantly strengthen brand trust, particularly among younger consumers. Empirical studies further confirm that customer reviews and service quality influence purchase intentions through the mediating role of brand trust, highlighting the importance of this relationship in digital consumption environments (Villagra et al., 2021).

2.1.4. Perceived Risk

Perceived risk has been identified as a key determinant of consumers' perceived value and behavioral intention to use online food delivery services, with higher levels of perceived risk reducing consumers' willingness to transact through these platforms while diminishing trust and satisfaction (Shankar et al., 2024). Similarly, consumer trust plays a critical role in encouraging the continued use of online food delivery services, suggesting that reducing perceived risks strengthens users' confidence and intention to order (Chiu et al., 2024). Furthermore, concerns related to product quality, service reliability, and uncertainty have been shown to discourage consumers from adopting food delivery applications despite the convenience they offer (Prisco et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that

consumers actively assess potential risks before placing an order, highlighting the importance of minimizing uncertainty to foster trust, encourage ordering decisions, and sustain continued use of online food delivery platforms.

2.1.5. Contextual Factors Affecting Ordering Decisions

In terms of ordering behavior, both brand image and electronic word-of-mouth have been found to influence purchasing decisions significantly, with brand image often exerting a stronger impact (Jamila & Siregar, 2022). Likewise, customer satisfaction, trust, and service quality collectively contribute to repeat purchasing behavior, reinforcing the importance of positive initial experiences in driving customer retention. Even in experiential marketing research, the authors suggest that emotional and sensory elements, such as visual food presentation and delivery interactions, enhance customer satisfaction and increase the likelihood of repeat purchases (Sukaeri et al., 2023). Overall, the literature highlights the interconnected roles of online reviews, trust, and experience in shaping consumer decision-making within digital food delivery platforms.

2.2. Synthesis of the Literature

The studies discussed above consistently demonstrate that online customer reviews have become a vital source of information that influences consumer decision-making on digital food delivery platforms. Previous scholarly outputs emphasize that review attributes, including sentiment, credibility, ratings, level of detail, customer-generated photos, and review recency, shape consumers' perceptions of product quality, service reliability, and overall restaurant performance (Adak et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Consumers utilize these review characteristics to reduce uncertainty, evaluate available alternatives, and make more informed and sounder purchasing decisions, particularly when they have limited personal experience with a restaurant or food delivery service.

In addition, the literature further indicates that online customer reviews (e.g., positive reviews, reliable reviewer information, and consistent service experiences) contribute significantly to the development or erosion of consumer trust, whereas negative reviews, inconsistent experiences, and perceived service failures diminish confidence and discourage purchase intentions (Villagra et al., 2021; Zaheer et al., 2024). Likewise, perceived risk remains a critical factor influencing consumers' reliance on online reviews, as concerns regarding food quality, delivery reliability, transaction security, and service consistency motivate consumers to seek validation from the experiences of previous customers before placing an order (Chiu et al., 2024; Prisco et al., 2024; Shankar et al., 2024).

Beyond review characteristics, existing studies also acknowledge that ordering decisions are shaped by contextual factors such as convenience, pricing, promotional offers, perceived service quality, brand image, and prior customer experiences (Barua & Deshpande, 2025; Jamila & Siregar, 2022; Lam, 2023). These factors interact with online customer reviews to influence consumers' evaluations and purchase intentions, suggesting that ordering behavior results from a combination of informational, psychological, and situational considerations rather than from review content alone.

After scrutinizing various studies, the researchers observed that most adopted quantitative approaches to examine statistical relationships among review characteristics, trust, and purchase intention. Also, there remains a limited understanding of how consumers personally interpret online customer reviews, build trust, evaluate perceived risks, and integrate contextual factors throughout their decision-making process. In particular, few studies have explored these experiences in the context of fast-food delivery applications from consumers' perspectives. This gap highlights the need for a qualitative investigation that

captures the meanings consumers assign to online customer reviews and explains how review attributes, previous experiences, perceived risks, and contextual considerations collectively shape trust formation and ordering decisions.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences and decision-making processes of users of fast-food delivery applications, thereby providing a richer understanding of consumer behavior beyond what has been established through quantitative evidence.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is built on the principles of Information Processing Theory, the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), and Perceived Risk Theory that together create a framework to understand the cognitive processes consumers go through during the interpretation of online customer reviews, the development of trust, and ordering decisions within fast food delivery applications. These are complementary theories since they help to understand how consumers respond to the information in the reviews, why they may choose between simplified and detailed evaluation procedures, and how they utilize the information to control their uncertainty and perceived risk during the purchasing decision.

The theory of Information Processing is a foundation for understanding how consumers acquire, interpret, organize and use information for decision making. When food is being delivered electronically, a lot of information is presented to consumers such as star ratings, written reviews, pictures uploaded by the customer, prices, promotional offers, and feedback on the services provided. When presented with an abundance of information, consumers have limited cognitive capacity, and may focus on the information that is most relevant to their decision. The purpose of this study is to use the theory as a framework to analyze how various kinds of review information are interpreted by consumers and how they are utilized to assess restaurants, service quality, and available alternatives.

The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) also provides insight into the discrepancies in online customer review processing. Heuristic processing is based on easily accessible signals, for example how many ratings there are, how many reviews, how recent the reviews are, or visual signals like the number of stars. Systematic processing, on the other hand, is more careful consideration of detailed written reviews, prior customer experiences, service information, and uniformity of feedback across reviews. The HSM is therefore appropriate for this study as consumers, who experience a food delivery service, can switch between heuristic judgments and systematic evaluation based on, among other things, familiarity with the restaurant, the time available, the perceived importance of the purchase, and uncertainty.

Perceived Risk Theory offers another insight into why consumers trust the online customer reviews prior to ordering. Online food purchasing is uncertain due to the fact that consumers are not able to directly see the food or service before making the purchase. Potential threats could include product quality, delivery precision, service reliability, transactions security, and the prospect that the real product might not match the presentation. Online customer reviews can then be used as a risk-reduction tool as consumers gain from the experiences of others, check restaurant credibility, and gain further validation before buying.

The three theoretical perspectives can be used together to investigate and evaluate the consumer decision-making process in relation to fast food delivery applications. Theories that explain how consumers acquire information regarding a product or service and how they interpret it (Information Processing Theory), whether they are relying on quick cues or more careful evaluation when purchasing information (Heuristic-Systematic Model), and why consumers seek and rely on information when they have uncertainty (Perceived Risk Theory). These lenses are theoretical frameworks that help interpret the process of brand trust building

and destroying as well as the role of review attributes, past experiences, perceived risk, and context factors in consumer ordering decisions.

3. Methods

3.1. Design and Environment

The researchers used a single-case study design to explore consumers' experiences with online customer reviews in fast-food delivery applications. This approach enabled the researchers to understand how individuals perceive, interpret, and make meaning of online customer reviews in their ordering decisions at a particular location, which in this case, is the Minglanilla, Cebu. At the same time, the case study design provided an in-depth examination of this phenomenon within the context of fast-food delivery platforms.

3.2. Participants and Sampling Technique

There were ten (10) consumers from Minglanilla, Cebu, who participated in this study. These participants have prior experience using fast-food delivery applications and have relied on online customer reviews when making food-ordering decisions. Their experiences form the basis for the researchers' belief that these participants can provide rich, relevant information necessary to achieve the study's objectives. In particular, the study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in qualitative research, to select participants. These participants were intentionally selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria, specifically individuals who had experience using food delivery applications and reading online customer reviews before placing food orders. This sampling approach ensured that participants possessed sufficient knowledge and firsthand experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

3.3. Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected through a face-to-face Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 10 participants. The discussion lasted approximately one (1) hour. It was guided by a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes regarding online customer reviews. Prior to the discussion, informed consent was obtained from all participants. With their permission, the session was audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of the discussion. Field notes were also taken to capture participants' non-verbal expressions and significant observations that complemented the verbal responses.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a systematic coding process. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses. The transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data before assigning initial codes to meaningful statements. Similar codes were then grouped into categories, from which broader themes were developed. These themes reflected the participants' shared experiences and perspectives on how online customer reviews influence trust formation and ordering decisions in fast-food delivery applications.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards for qualitative research. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study before voluntarily providing written informed consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used throughout the transcripts and research report. All audio recordings, transcripts, and related research data were securely stored and made accessible only to the researchers. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy were maintained throughout the study to ensure the ethical treatment of all participants.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results and discussion were presented after the researchers gathered and analyzed data from participants, aiming to understand their worldviews and how these shape their reviews, which in turn affect their trust in the brand and their decision-making when ordering from a fast-food application.

4.1. Results of the Thematic Analysis

4.1.1. Theme 1: Convenience as an Entry Point to Digital Food Consumption

Participants consistently portrayed convenience as the primary situational catalyst for engaging with fast-food delivery applications, and online food delivery as a practical solution during late-night hours, periods of intense hunger, and when traveling to a restaurant was inconvenient.

P1 stated, *"I usually order at night, especially once the local stores have closed, and there's no public transport available to go out."* At the same time, P5 explained, *"I prefer it when I am already very hungry because you can place an order instantly. If you go in person, you still have to travel all the way to the store"*.

Participants further associated their continued use of food delivery platforms with behavioral changes that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that online food ordering has evolved from a temporary response to mobility restrictions into an established consumption practice integrated into everyday life. Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrated that convenience alone does not sufficiently explain consumers' ordering decisions. Although convenience encourages initial platform engagement, participants emphasized the importance of online customer reviews particularly when evaluating unfamiliar restaurants or making purchase decisions under uncertainty. Reviews helped participants assess perceived reliability, food quality, delivery performance, and overall service credibility. For familiar restaurants or repeat purchases, however, prior experience may reduce the need to consult reviews before ordering.

4.1.2. Theme 2: Online Reviews as Cognitive Shortcuts in Restaurant Evaluation and Decision Filters

Participants consistently described online customer reviews as an indispensable source of information that simplified the restaurant selection process. Rather than evaluating every available option extensively, participants described relying on online reviews as cognitive shortcuts that simplified restaurant selection, particularly when faced with numerous alternatives or limited time.

P1 described reviews as *"the eyes and ears of customers,"* explaining that consumers typically review previous customers' experiences before deciding whether to place an order, as

unfavorable feedback often creates hesitation and uncertainty. In contrast, another participant emphasized that reviews become especially valuable when trying unfamiliar restaurants, as ratings, best-selling menu items, delivery feedback, and previous customer experiences collectively indicate whether a restaurant is worth trying. P3 likewise reported examining specific review attributes, including food quality, service reliability, delivery speed, and packaging condition, P4 stated that *“good packaging ensures that the food remains fresh during delivery.”*

Another highlight is that delivery speed and food condition are among the most influential considerations, as consumers expect their orders to arrive promptly and in satisfactory condition. The findings suggest that consumers employ both heuristic and systematic information-processing strategies when evaluating restaurants on food delivery platforms. Aggregate indicators, such as star ratings and overall review scores, may serve as heuristic cues that enable consumers to form initial judgments quickly and reduce the number of available alternatives. However, when greater uncertainty exists particularly when consumers have limited or no prior experience with a restaurant, they may engage in more systematic processing by examining detailed review narratives concerning food quality, delivery performance, packaging condition, and service reliability. Thus, online customer reviews facilitate decision-making through a combination of heuristic cues and more deliberate evaluation, with the level of information processing varying according to consumers’ familiarity with the restaurant and the perceived uncertainty associated with the purchase.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Trust Formation and Erosion Through Review Consistency

Brand trust emerged as a dynamic construct shaped by participants’ continuous evaluation of review credibility and consistency. Participants consistently associated positive reviews with increased confidence in both the restaurant and the delivery application, whereas negative reviews led to hesitation and reduced their willingness to place an order.

P1 explained, *“Positive reviews can make customers trust the application more. If people see that many customers have already ordered from the store and left good feedback, it becomes easier for new buyers to trust the service. However, if there are already issues or many errors reported in the reviews, especially regarding delivery problems, it can reduce customer trust. Because of that, customers may hesitate before ordering.”*

This account illustrates the role of reviews in facilitating trust formation when consumers rely on the experiences of previous customers. However, participants’ accounts also revealed that the role of reviews varies according to prior brand familiarity. P2 explained, *“Usually I trust big stores such as Jollibee or McDonald’s. But when it comes to smaller stores, I do not easily trust them. Most of the time I prefer using Cash on Delivery because I already experienced being scammed before.”*

This distinction suggests that trust in established brands may already exist through familiarity, reputation, and previous consumption experiences, reducing consumers’ dependence on online reviews. In contrast, reviews become more important when evaluating unfamiliar or lesser-known restaurants, where consumers have limited prior experience and therefore rely more heavily on other customers’ experiences to assess product quality, service reliability, and merchant credibility. Previous transaction experiences also shaped this process. P3 described receiving an incorrect item after completing a cash-on-delivery transaction, while P4 reported that after receiving an incorrect product, the seller stopped

responding and blocked further communication. These experiences increased caution in subsequent online transactions. Taken together, the findings distinguish pre-existing brand trust, derived primarily from familiarity and previous experience, from review-driven trust formation, which becomes particularly important when consumers encounter unfamiliar restaurants or perceive greater purchasing risk. Thus, online reviews do not uniformly create or erode trust; rather, their role depends on consumers' existing familiarity with the brand, prior experiences, and perceived uncertainty surrounding the transaction.

4.1.4. Theme 4: Risk Aversion and Defensive Decision-Making Behavior

Participants' narratives demonstrated that previous negative purchasing experiences substantially heightened perceptions of risk. Participants' narratives demonstrated that prior negative experiences, including incorrect orders, product quality issues, and fraudulent transactions, heightened their awareness of potential risks and led them to be more cautious when purchasing on digital platforms.

P6 shared, *"I rarely order online because I was traumatized by a previous experience... I asked for humba with lumpia, but what arrived was shrimp with lumpia. Since I am allergic to shrimp, I just had to sell the food to someone else."* At the same time, P1 recounted receiving an item that differed from what was ordered and explained that the seller subsequently blocked all communication after payment had been made. These experiences illustrate that perceived risk extends beyond financial concerns to include product quality, delivery accuracy, food safety, and transaction security.

Consequently, participants described online customer reviews as a protective mechanism that enables them to assess restaurant credibility, verify product quality, and reduce the likelihood of similar problems in future transactions. P1 emphasized, *"Reviews can encourage customers to check a product first before ordering. Since there are many scams online, customers usually investigate and read the reviews before purchasing,"* highlighting the role of online reviews in reducing uncertainty and increasing purchase confidence. Rather than relying solely on star ratings, participants reported carefully examining detailed comments, customer experiences, and reviewer feedback to evaluate whether restaurants and sellers could be trusted.

4.1.5. Theme 5: Interaction of Reviews with Economic Incentives and Visual Validation

Ordering decisions were rarely based on online reviews alone; instead, participants integrated promotional incentives, pricing considerations, service quality, and visual evidence before making purchasing decisions. P1 consistently identified vouchers, discounts, and free shipping as important motivations for using food delivery applications; however, these economic incentives were considered insufficient unless accompanied by favorable customer reviews.

P3 and P4 explained that online platforms are often *"much cheaper due to vouchers and free shipping."* At the same time, another noted that price differences and promotional offers influence ordering decisions only when immediate needs do not constrain consumers. Participants likewise emphasized that service-related attributes, including preparation time, delivery speed, packaging quality, and the condition of the food upon arrival, significantly influence their evaluation of restaurants before making a purchase.

P4 remarked, *"Good packaging ensures that the food remains fresh during delivery,"* emphasizing that customers value not only the quality of the food itself but also the overall delivery experience. In addition to textual reviews, participants reported relying heavily on customer-uploaded photographs, detailed comments, and star ratings to verify whether

products accurately matched their online descriptions. P2 explained that *“Some customers check star ratings first, while others read the comments or look at photos uploaded by other buyers to confirm that the product is real,”* illustrating that visual evidence serves as an important mechanism for confirming authenticity and managing expectations before completing a transaction.

4.2. Discussion

The first theme indicates that convenience functions as an initial motivational factor, whereas online customer reviews operate as a cognitive validation mechanism that reduces uncertainty and reinforces purchase confidence. Consequently, convenience and review evaluation should be understood as complementary processes rather than independent determinants of consumer behavior. These findings corroborate previous evidence indicating that convenience and ease of use are important drivers of online food delivery adoption, while the availability and quality of online information also influence consumers' evaluations and purchase intentions (Reddy, 2019). The findings also partially contradict evidence suggesting that concerns about product uncertainty and service reliability may diminish the influence of convenience on technology adoption (Lee et al., 2020).

The present findings suggest that perceived uncertainty does not diminish the role of convenience; rather, it encourages consumers to seek additional information through online customer reviews before making a purchase. Consistent with Information Processing Theory, convenience facilitates initial platform engagement, whereas online reviews support the evaluation of relevant information necessary for informed decision-making. These findings underscore the importance of integrating efficient platform functionality with credible, transparent, and accessible customer review systems to strengthen consumer trust, reduce perceived risk, and promote confident ordering decisions.

The second theme reinforces the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which posits that user-generated content shapes consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior by reducing uncertainty in digital environments (Sahut et al., 2024). Likewise, the findings support evidence that consumers frequently rely on easily accessible review information, particularly ratings and summarized feedback, as heuristic cues when making purchase decisions under time constraints (Zhang et al., 2024). However, the present study extends existing literature by demonstrating that participants' decisions were not based solely on numerical ratings; instead, they systematically examined written comments, delivery experiences, packaging quality, and customer narratives before determining whether a restaurant could be trusted. This observation is consistent with studies showing that detailed textual reviews are perceived as more informative than aggregate ratings when evaluating experience-based products such as food (Jin et al., 2023) and that review characteristics, including reviewer experiences, review format, and informational content, function as decision filters that simplify restaurant selection while reducing information overload (Fernandes et al., 2022).

Viewed through the lens of Information Processing Theory and the Heuristic-Systematic Model, the findings suggest that consumers combine heuristic cues, such as star ratings, with systematic evaluation of detailed review content to reduce uncertainty and support informed ordering decisions. These findings highlight the importance of credible, transparent, and comprehensive review systems that incorporate verified customer feedback and visual evidence to strengthen consumer trust and facilitate confident purchase decisions. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that online customer reviews serve as cognitive filters that shape consumers' evaluations of restaurants and ultimately influence their ordering decisions.

For the third theme, these findings indicate that brand trust is developed through a continuous evaluation of review consistency, authenticity, and organizational responsiveness rather than through isolated positive or negative evaluations alone. Various studies prove this point. In fact, Sidiq et al. (2025) argued that online customer reviews significantly influence consumers' trust formation and purchase intention by serving as credible sources of social proof. Similarly, Al-kfairy et al. (2024) support findings consistent with evidence that verified, transparent, and authentic review systems strengthen consumer confidence by reducing uncertainty and increasing perceptions of platform credibility. Furthermore, studies on online food delivery services emphasize that consumer trust remains a critical determinant of continued platform usage, particularly when perceived risks associated with product quality and service reliability are minimized (Mishra et al., 2023).

Anchored in through the perspective of Information Processing Theory, consumers actively evaluate review consistency, authenticity, and prior customer experiences before developing trust, indicating that trust formation is an iterative cognitive process rather than an immediate response to review valence. These findings therefore underscore the importance of food delivery platforms and partner restaurants implementing transparent review verification mechanisms, responding promptly to customer concerns, and maintaining consistent service quality to strengthen consumer trust and reduce perceived uncertainty. Ultimately, this theme directly addresses the study's objective of examining how online customer reviews contribute to the development or erosion of trust by demonstrating that consumers' trust is shaped not only by the presence of positive or negative reviews but also by their perceived consistency, credibility, authenticity, and alignment with previous customer experiences.

The fourth theme that emerged in this study indicates that online customer reviews serve as a risk-reduction strategy, enabling consumers to actively seek information before committing to a purchase. The findings are consistent with previous studies identifying perceived risk as a critical determinant of consumer behavior in online food delivery services, demonstrating that concerns regarding product quality, service reliability, and transaction uncertainty reduce consumers' willingness to use digital platforms when adequate information is unavailable (Ou et al., 2022). Likewise, previous research has shown that perceived risks, particularly product and time-related risks, can reduce consumers' intention to continue using online food delivery services, whereas greater trust strengthens continuance intention (Karahana, 2025). Similarly, concerns about product uncertainty and service reliability have been found to discourage consumers from adopting food delivery applications despite the convenience these platforms offer (Munikrishnan et al., 2021).

Examined through the lens of Perceived Risk Theory, the present findings demonstrate that consumers actively seek information to reduce uncertainty before making purchase decisions, with online customer reviews serving as an essential mechanism for evaluating potential losses and increasing confidence in digital transactions. From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the importance of implementing credible review verification systems, transparent customer feedback mechanisms, and responsive complaint resolution processes to reduce perceived risk and strengthen consumer trust. Ultimately, this theme directly addresses the study's objective of exploring how previous experiences and perceived risks shape consumers' reliance on online customer reviews by demonstrating that adverse experiences increase consumers' dependence on review information as a means of protecting themselves from future financial, functional, and service-related risks while supporting more informed ordering decisions.

Lastly, the fifth theme suggests that online customer reviews operate within a broader decision-making ecosystem in which economic incentives encourage initial interest, while review content and visual validation provide the informational assurance necessary to strengthen trust and reduce uncertainty. The findings support prior research showing that experiential and visual cues significantly enhance consumer confidence and purchasing behavior by enabling consumers to verify product authenticity and assess expected service quality before purchase (Mandal et al., 2025). Likewise, studies on online food delivery services have shown that promotional incentives, competitive pricing, and convenience positively influence consumers' behavioral intentions when supported by credible review information and positive service experiences (Ahmad, 2023).

Based on the perspective of Information Processing Theory, consumers integrate multiple sources of information, including economic incentives, visual cues, and customer-generated reviews, to evaluate alternatives and reduce uncertainty before making purchasing decisions. Rather than functioning independently, these contextual factors complement online customer reviews by reinforcing consumers' confidence in both the product and the service provider. From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of food delivery platforms and partner restaurants combining attractive promotional strategies with transparent review systems, authentic customer-generated images, and consistently high service quality. Such an integrated approach may strengthen consumer trust, improve purchase confidence, and encourage repeat patronage. Ultimately, this theme directly addresses the study's objective of describing how contextual factors interact with online customer reviews by demonstrating that consumers synthesize economic, experiential, and informational cues to make more confident, informed ordering decisions. (see Table 1 for a summary of themes, supporting evidence, and theoretical alignment).

Table 1. Summary of Themes, Supporting Participant Evidence, Theoretical Alignment, and Prior Literature

Theme	Key Finding	Supporting Quote(s)	Theoretical Alignment	Prior Literature
Theme 1: Convenience as an Entry Point to Digital Food Consumption	Convenience initiates the use of food delivery applications, particularly during late hours, hunger, limited transportation, and situations where physical store visits are inconvenient. However, convenience alone does not determine the final ordering decision, particularly for unfamiliar restaurants.	P1: <i>"I usually order at night—especially once the local stores have closed, and there's no public transport available to go out."</i> P5: <i>"I prefer it when I am already very hungry because you can place an order instantly. If you go in person, you still have to travel all the way to the store."</i>	Information Processing Theory, situational conditions such as time, accessibility, and immediate needs affect the amount and type of information consumers consider during decision-making.	Chiu et al. (2024); Prisco et al. (2024)
Theme 2: Online	Consumers use ratings and reviews	P1: <i>"Customer reviews or</i>	Heuristic-Systematic	Jin et al. (2023);

Theme	Key Finding	Supporting Quote(s)	Theoretical Alignment	Prior Literature
Reviews as Cognitive Shortcuts in Restaurant Evaluation and Decision Filters	to reduce information overload and quickly narrow restaurant choices. When uncertainty is higher, particularly for unfamiliar restaurants, consumers move beyond ratings and examine detailed comments about food quality, delivery, and packaging.	<i>feedback online serve as the eyes and ears of customers.” P3: “Online reviews are very useful, especially if you want to try a new restaurant that you’ve never ordered from before.” P4: “Good packaging ensures that the food remains fresh during delivery.”</i>	Model (HSM) and Information Processing Theory, ratings can operate as heuristic cues for rapid evaluation, whereas detailed review narratives support more systematic processing when consumers perceive greater uncertainty.	Pocchiari et al. (2023); Seutter et al. (2023); Zhang et al. (2024)
Theme 3: Brand Familiarity and Review-Driven Trust Formation	Trust operates differently depending on brand familiarity. Established brands may benefit from pre-existing trust based on reputation and prior experience, whereas reviews play a stronger trust-building role for unfamiliar or lesser-known restaurants. Negative experiences further increase caution.	P1: <i>“Positive reviews can make customers trust the application more.”</i> P2: <i>“Usually I trust big stores such as Jollibee or McDonald’s. But when it comes to smaller stores, I do not easily trust them.”</i> P4: <i>“After receiving the payment, the seller blocked me and stopped replying to my messages. Because of that experience, I became more careful when ordering online.”</i>	Heuristic-Systematic Model and Perceived Risk Theory — established brand familiarity can function as a heuristic trust cue, whereas unfamiliar merchants generate greater uncertainty and encourage consumers to seek review information before developing trust.	Gupta (2024); Villagra et al. (2021); Zaheer et al. (2024)
Theme 4: Risk Aversion and Defensive Decision-Making Behavior	Previous negative experiences heighten perceived risk and make consumers more cautious. Reviews consequently function as a protective mechanism for evaluating	P6: <i>“I rarely order online because I was traumatized by a previous experience... I asked for humba with lumpia, but what arrived was shrimp with lumpia.”</i> P1:	Perceived Risk Theory — consumers seek additional information to reduce uncertainty and protect themselves from potential financial,	Chiu et al. (2024); Prisco et al. (2024); Shankar et al. (2024)

Theme	Key Finding	Supporting Quote(s)	Theoretical Alignment	Prior Literature
	credibility, product quality, food safety, transaction security, and service reliability before purchasing.	<i>"Since there are many scams online, customers usually investigate and read the reviews before purchasing."</i>	product-quality, food-safety, and service-related risks.	
Theme 5: Interaction of Reviews with Economic Incentives and Visual Validation	Ordering decisions result from the interaction of reviews with pricing, vouchers, promotions, delivery performance, packaging, and visual evidence. Consumers therefore synthesize several informational, economic, and experiential cues rather than relying on reviews alone.	P1: Online platforms can be <i>"much cheaper due to vouchers and free shipping."</i> P3: Consumers consider <i>"preparation time," "delivery speed,"</i> and <i>"packaging."</i> P2: <i>"Some customers check star ratings first, while others read the comments or look at photos uploaded by other buyers to confirm that the product is real."</i>	Information Processing Theory and Heuristic-Systematic Model, consumers integrate multiple information sources, while ratings, photographs, prices, and promotional cues can facilitate rapid evaluation and detailed reviews provide additional validation when needed.	Barua & Deshpande (2025); Jamila & Siregar (2022); Lam (2023)

Source: Processed data (2026)

4.3. Theoretical and Sustainability Contribution

The influence of online reviews on consumers' purchasing decisions is not uniform but depends on the nature of the review and how the information is processed. Consumers draw on a range of review-related cues during information processing to determine which details are most useful when evaluating their options. Review-related attributes, product-related contextual factors, and review characteristics can jointly shape the perceived helpfulness of reviews, helping consumers manage information overload and reduce purchase uncertainty. Online reviews can therefore be understood as a form of decision-support information whose value depends on both review content and purchase context (Choi & Leon, 2020).

In terms of sustainability, transparent review systems and informed consumer decision-making can support SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by enabling consumers to make more informed purchasing choices and encouraging restaurants to strengthen product and service accountability. Information about food quality and safety may also contribute to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), while feedback on packaging and delivery can create opportunities for platforms and restaurants to adopt more sustainable practices relevant to SDG 13 (Climate Action). These SDG connections should be understood as general practical implications of the findings rather than as direct results of the study itself.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that customers' online opinions play a critical role in shaping decisions about ordering from fast-food delivery applications. Although the ease of use of a platform can make it more attractive, consumers rely on reviews to gauge food quality, service reliability, delivery performance, and restaurant credibility, particularly when they are unfamiliar with a given restaurant. Review attributes such as accuracy, completeness, timeliness, consistency, quantity, ratings, and visual cues shape consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions when ordering food through mobile applications. The results also distinguish between pre-existing trust, which stems from brand familiarity and past experience, and review-driven trust, which becomes more relevant when consumers lack information about a restaurant or perceive a higher level of purchasing risk. Trust built through online reviews is a primary driver of continued consumer purchase intentions. Beyond reviews alone, consumers also weigh price, promotions, customer-generated photographs, service quality, and past experiences when making ordering decisions. The study therefore offers a more contextualized view of online reviews as decision-support tools that help consumers weigh alternatives, reduce uncertainty, and arrive at informed ordering decisions.

In light of these results, food delivery platforms and partner restaurants should consider several actions. They should encourage genuine customer reviews while reducing fake, manipulated, or unreliable ones to strengthen review credibility and transparency. They should also give customers the opportunity to contribute visual content, such as real images of food and packaging, so that product quality and expectations can be assured before purchase. Prompt and professional responses to negative feedback are important for demonstrating that customer concerns are heard and addressed, reinforcing accountability. Consistent food and service quality, maintained through attention to preparation time, packaging, delivery accuracy, and food condition, is also essential, since inconsistency in these areas can undermine consumer confidence. Promotions should be paired with positive service experiences rather than relying on discounts, vouchers, or free delivery alone, as consumers value quality reviews and perceived service alongside economic incentives. Platforms and restaurants should also prioritize trust-building efforts for lesser-known restaurants, since trust matters most where consumers have limited familiarity or prior experience.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study employed a qualitative method with a relatively small, context-specific sample; therefore, the findings are intended to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences rather than statistical generalizations about all users of food delivery applications. Second, participants' responses were self-reported and may have been influenced by recall bias or personal perceptions. Third, the study focused primarily on consumers' experiences with online customer reviews and did not examine potential differences across demographic characteristics, specific food delivery platforms, restaurant categories, or frequency of platform usage. Finally, because consumer behavior and digital platform features continue to evolve, the findings reflect participants' experiences within a particular period and context.

Future research may address these limitations by employing mixed-methods or quantitative designs with larger, more diverse samples to examine the relationships among review credibility, trust, perceived risk, and purchasing behavior across geographic locations and digital food delivery platforms. Comparative studies involving multiple platforms or longitudinal investigations may also provide a broader understanding of how online customer reviews influence consumer decision-making over time.

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