



Decoding Consumer Perspectives on Homemade Food Delivery Platforms in Emerging Economies: Insights from Latent Dirichlet Allocation of User-Generated Content

B.M Rijas^{1*}, T. Radha Ramanan², K. Muhammed Shafi³

^{1*}B. M. Rijas, Research Scholar, National Institute of Technology Calicut, Kerala, India. Email: rijas_p200113ms@nitc.ac.in , Orcid id: 0000-0002-3839-4338

²Dr. T. Radha Ramanan, Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, National Institute of Technology, Calicut, Kerala, India. Email: radha_ramanan@nitc.ac.in , Orcid id: 0000-0002-3669-6025

³Dr. K. Muhammed Shafi, Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, National Institute of Technology, Calicut, Kerala, India. Email: shafi@nitc.ac.in , Orcid id: 0000-0002-6667-576X

ABSTRACT

Despite the potential to empower home chef, facilitate access to traditional homemade foods, and contribute to more inclusive and culturally embedded food consumption, online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain in their nascent stage and have received limited scholarly attention, particularly in emerging economies such as India. This study investigates the factors underlying the nascent development of online homemade food platforms and their implications for sustainable digital platform development. Qualitative research design comprises of thematic and sentiment analysis was employed. Thematic and sentiment analyses were conducted on 2,351 consumer reviews collected from websites and mobile applications of homemade food platform in India, using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation technique and six topic or theme is generated. Sentiment analysis is done on each generated theme. Topic 1 such as love, like, enjoy, happy, frustrated, angry, disappointed, hate, satisfied value shows a high positive sentiment (80.16%) and high frequency of occurrence (88.9%). Topic 2 such as taste, convenience, efficiency, delivery, schedule, useful, discount, offer, promotion, app, platform, website, technology, interface, automation, digital, online second highest frequency of occurrence (84.07%) and comparatively low positive sentiment (70.92%). Remaining theme shows low to moderate frequency and medium sentiment. The findings suggest that to develop sustainable digital platform for homemade food, platform first address fundamental themes included in topic 2 and subsequently enhance themes included in topic 1 to encourage sustained consumer engagement. By identifying the value conditions underlying consumer adoption, the study contributes to understanding how sustainable digital platforms can develop in homemade-food ecosystems while creating opportunities for home chef and preserving socially and culturally embedded food practices.

Keywords: Homemade food; Platform Model; Thematic Analysis; Latent Dirichlet Allocation

1. Introduction

In recent years, consumer preferences for food have rapidly changed owing to technological advancements, increasing health awareness, lifestyle changes, and food exploration behaviours (Ray et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated some of these changes (Mouloudj et al., 2025). Given this increasing trend, startups are increasingly attempting to establish online food delivery (hereinafter referred to as OFD) platforms worldwide. These increasing attempts have also led to the exploration of OFD platforms in niche segments, such as homemade food. Although organic food restaurants and platforms have been widely studied (Ray et al., 2024), the dynamics of homemade food (hereinafter referred to as HFPs) remain relatively unexplored in the existing literature.

For this study, homemade food refers to wholesome food products prepared using traditional techniques and natural ingredients that possess social and cultural value, regional or national specificity, and are usually produced within the household premises (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021). HFPs are a prominent example of digital platforms that facilitate access to traditional homemade local cuisines. Homemade Food Platforms

(HFPs) are multi-sided digital platform businesses that facilitate direct transactions between small-scale homemade food producers and consumers seeking freshly prepared traditional foods, such as homemade meals and healthy diet-specific meals, through digital platforms and associated services. In this study, HFPs comprised food delivery platforms or apps that sell homemade food by connecting individual small-scale home chef and platforms that exclusively own and operate cloud kitchens that comply with all regulatory and legitimacy requirements and allow multiple chefs to prepare homemade food (Jha & Som Sekhar Bhattacharyya, 2018; Shroff & Shah, 2023).

The idea of HFPs showing an increasing trend often attracts many startup owners, and many attempts have been made worldwide, including in India (Colpaart 2025). Our Google search identified nine HFPs currently operating in India, while approximately 20 additional platforms appear to be inactive or in the early stages of development, indicating the nascent stage of homemade food platforms in India. Although both homemade food platforms (HFPs) and restaurant-based food delivery platforms (RFPs) operate within the broader digital food service ecosystem, they differ significantly in terms of consumption values, targeted customer segments, and supplier or complementor characteristics. The complementor side of OFD services is usually restaurant businesses with independent brand value, standardized workflow, and consistency. The core value proposition of a typical OFD is its delivery service. However, unlike restaurants, homemade food providers are often perceived as small, unorganised businesses, which can lead to concerns about low brand recognition, limited trust, limited visibility and questions regarding their safety standards (Mason et al., 2011; Hagi, 2015; Aiswarya & Ramasundaram, 2024). Therefore, similar to OFD platforms, mere delivery as a core value proposition is insufficient when OFD enters the homemade food sector. In RFPs, consumers typically prioritize utilitarian benefits such as rapid delivery, cost efficiency, and access to preferred brands (Kaur et al., 2021). In contrast, consumer expectations of HFPs are centred on authenticity, perceived healthiness, local culinary identity, and emotional resonance (Parthasarathi et al., 2022; Malota & Mucsi, 2023). These differences in consumer expectations, value propositions, and consumer segments indicate that HFPs are not merely an extension of restaurant food delivery platforms but represent a distinct service domain.

HFPs are particularly important because they can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by ensuring consumer health and well-being, promoting decent work opportunities, and fostering sustainable economic growth, particularly through home chef empowerment and regional economic development. Serving homemade food has been acknowledged as a sustainable approach to nourishing future generations (Parthasarathi et al., 2022). Furthermore, HFPs can contribute significantly to the tourism industry by catering to tourists' interest in authentic local cuisines (Malota & Mucsi, 2023). However, this potential has been leveraged by only a limited number of platforms, most of which remain in their infancy. Moreover, the failure rate of these startups is usually high, and the reasons for failure include business model development failure, such as failing to solve the chicken-and-egg problem, failing to attain critical mass and network effects, and legitimacy-related barriers imposed by policymakers, such as state health departments (Srinivasan, 2021; Colpaart, 2025; Beckett & Dalrymple, 2019).

Researchers argue that although a business model is not the sole determinant of business success, it remains a critical factor. For instance, Beckett and Dalrymple (2019) emphasize in their work that "a great idea launched with an inappropriate business model will be less successful than an average idea launched with a strong business model", highlighting the significant influence of business models. Understanding why homemade food online food platforms remain nascent in emerging economies and what factors should be prioritized to strengthen and advance homemade food platforms (HFPs) will help HFPs redesign their platform business model parameters, such as value creation logic, platform architecture, governance, and platform competition (Tura et al., 2018). However, despite their importance, empirical research on traditional food delivery platforms remains limited. This led us to address the following research questions:

RQ: Why do online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies, and what factors should be prioritised to enhance platform adoption?

To address the stated research questions, this study performed a thematic analysis of user-generated content (UGC) (2351 online reviews of HFPs) using a Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based topic modelling technique. Results show that topic 1 include taste, convenience, efficiency, delivery, schedule, usefulness, discount, offer, promotion, interface, etc has the highest negative sentiment and high frequency in comments, indicating that the critical factors influencing the nascent stage are the inability to provide effectively and efficiently. The second highest frequency factor is topic 2 that include love, like, enjoy, happy, frustrated, angry, disappointed, hate, satisfied, which indicates that people are interested in traditional food. After identifying each topic, a sentiment analysis on topic is done.

2. Research Background and Context

Ray et al. (2019) and Gunden et al. (2020) conducted pioneering studies on consumers' intentions to use online food delivery systems, which subsequently stimulated considerable scholarly attention worldwide. However, the homemade food platform is still a niche area with limited research has been carried out. Owing to the unexplored nature of the research area, this study adopted a qualitative approach, beginning with a thematic analysis of user-generated content related to HFPs. Through discussions among the authors and

experts in the food delivery platform domain, it was observed that the Theory of Consumption Values was well-suited for naming the topics identified through LDA.

The consumption value model (TCV) introduced by Sheth et al. (1991) has been extensively applied to analyse the values consumers derive from products and services. However, the TCV framework has been widely adopted in the specific research domain of food platforms only in recent research (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Tsang et al., 2026). However, these studies primarily focus on restaurant-based food delivery platforms, where suppliers possess comparatively stronger brand value and platforms function as an additional sales channel.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study adopts a consumption value perspective to understand consumers' choices of traditional food offerings. To the best of our knowledge, this study applies the consumption value perspective to HFPs in a relatively underexplored context, thereby contributing to the literature.

2.1 Define Consumption Values

Functional value: According to Sheth et al. (1991), functional value is the "perceived utility of a product or service" that is connected to functional, utilitarian, or physical performance. Functional values usually include price, utility, performance, food taste, ambience, atmosphere, service quality, staff behaviour, ease of use, reliability, and durability (Mohd Suki, 2016; Wang & Chen, 2012; Ray et al., 2024).

Emotional values: According to Chang et al. (2019), emotional values encompass the various emotional elements an individual obtains from a specific product or service. Emotional values typically include enjoyment, relaxation, pleasure, and love for a place (Ray et al., 2024).

Epistemic values: The concept of epistemic value pertains to the "perceived utility" that stimulates curiosity, introduces originality or innovation, and fulfils the desire for knowledge (Sheth et al., 1991). Epistemic values include unique or novel experiences (Phau et al., 2014), chemical-free and healthy (Mishra & Singh, 2016), and menu options (Ray et al., 2024).

Quality value: Quality value primarily concerns the "perceived utility" a consumer derives when a new or alternative service provider offers a high-quality product/service (Ray et al., 2024). Quality value includes consumers' perception that homemade food platforms provide good quality, hygienic food and maintain the quality standards they expect (Ray et al., 2021; Truong et al., 2017).

Social values: These values primarily illustrate "perceived utility," which arises from a person's affiliation with many social groups (Sheth et al., 1991). Social value includes environmentally aware or health-conscious consumers who tend to choose a healthy, homemade, or organic food restaurant because they feel a social connection with the restaurant (Puska, 2019). While following posts regarding the benefits of healthy food, consumers might want to connect with groups (Ray et al., 2024).

Conditional values: The concept of conditional value pertains to the "perceived utility" that an individual may derive from an alternative option in a particular situation (Sheth et al., 1991). Conditional values refer to situation-specific drivers of consumption. For example, if awareness of health, food safety, and environmental concerns increases among consumers, the demand for healthy food items also increases (Mishra & Singh, 2016).

3. Research Design

To explore and validate why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies, researchers employed qualitative research design. This study understanding why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies using online user-generated content of the homemade food platform. Researchers applied thematic analysis to user-generated content of HFPs by applying Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based topic modelling. These keywords were then grouped into broader themes and then applied sentiment analysis on developed themes. Why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies is explored using thematic and sentiment analyses. This approach was used to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies. The results identified must-have conditions, performance indicators, and delighters based on consumption values.

3.1. Data and Methods

This study used secondary data from user-generated content (UGC) from Google and app reviews of HFPs. The method is significant in this context because it (a) influences the decision-making processes of potential and returning consumers, (b) assists organisations in pinpointing areas for development. User-Generated Online Reviews (UGORs), a form of UGC, are perceived as trustworthy by individuals and typically exhibit minimal commercial bias (Ray et al., 2024). User-generated content is widely adopted in the service industry, such as e-commerce, to develop an improvement framework (Shen et al., 2026). An analysis of review data further indicates that most HFPs were established during 2019–2020, with the volume of user reviews increasing by approximately 300–400% between 2023 and 2024. This trend reflects a substantial rise in user engagement and growing acceptance of these platforms.

For this study, 4235 user-generated reviews from the Google review pages of nine distinct HFPs operating in various states of India were collected from 20/07/25 to 20/08/25. In India, homemade food platforms are in the early stages of development; therefore, purposive sampling was used to identify HFPs. We selected and used the content of only those homemade food platforms that had a minimum of 50 Google reviews (50) and a rating of three stars or higher. Google reviews are publicly accessible, readily downloadable, and reliable for consumers (Ray et al. 2024). We eliminated 975 records because of the absence of reviews and ratings. The final dataset comprised 3260 UGORs after evaluation by the nine HFPs. Subsequently, we removed stop words, acquired 3201 reviews, converted emojis, and removed comments in languages other than English, ultimately resulting in a dataset of 2351 reviews. Python programming was used for the data cleaning. Thematic analysis was applied to the data. Furthermore, themes were obtained by applying Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based topic modelling.

4. Results and Discussion

For the thematic analysis, researchers initially identified themes by applying Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based topic modelling to 2351 English reviews. The resulting topics were manually reviewed to avoid overlap, resulting in a final set of 63 keywords. These keywords were then grouped into broader themes. Subsequently, the emergent themes were compared with the dimensions of the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV). Researchers observed that the identified themes aligned with the five core value dimensions of functional, emotional, epistemic, conditional, and social values, consistent with previous studies on food delivery platforms in India (Chakraborty et al., 2022). Furthermore, in line with prior studies on organic food restaurants in India (Ray et al., 2024), quality value emerged as a relevant and distinct dimension in the present context. This approach first built themes from user data and then linked them to theory, helping to identify key constructs and improve the theoretical framework. The final keywords are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis.

Themes	Keywords	References
Functional Value	taste, convenience, efficiency, delivery, schedule, useful, discount, offer, promotion, app, platform, website, technology, interface, automation, digital, online	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2022; Yang and Mattila, 2016,
Emotional Value	Love, like, enjoy, happy, frustrated, angry, disappointed, hate, satisfied	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2019; Phau et al., 2014
Epistemic value	new, novel, curious, explore, learn, try, different, innovative, variety	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2019; Phau et al., 2014; Lin and Huang, 2012;
Conditional value	situation, availability, timing, urgent, limited, social value, friends, family, community, status, recommend, share, influence	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2022; Ray et al., 2021;
Social Value	friends, family, community, status, recommend, share, influence	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2019; Phau et al., 2014
Quality Value	quality, performance, trust, fair, privacy, honest, transparent, responsible	Tsang et al., 2026, Ray et al., 2024; Ray et al., 2021; Truong et al., 2017

Sentiment analysis was applied to each theme. The results show the frequencies of each theme in user comments and the sentiments associated with each theme. The results are presented in Table 2. All themes showed a significantly high level of positive sentiment. Among them, social value recorded the highest positive sentiment at 87.3%, but the frequency was low to moderate (23.5%). Epistemic value showed the second highest positive sentiment, whereas the observed frequency was very low (8.95%). Emotional value shows a high positive sentiment (80.16%) and high frequency of occurrence (88.9%). This indicates that

emotional value is an important factor and performs well. Functional value shows the second highest frequency of occurrence (84.07%) and comparatively low positive sentiment (70.92%). This indicates that functional value requires special attention. The conditional and quality values showed moderate frequency and positive sentiment.

The high importance of functional and emotional values indicates that customers prioritise both dimensions compared with another dimensions. However, approximately 30% of users are dissatisfied with functional value such as taste, convenience, and delivery. Similarly, 20% of customers were dissatisfied with emotional value.

To understand the reasons for this negative feedback, researchers summarize specific negative customer reviews. Customer complaints are primarily related to high costs, pricing issues, and unfavourable comparisons with competitors. Many customers express dissatisfaction with the price of the service, perceiving it as excessively high or not providing adequate value for money. Some reviews indicate a sense of being unfairly treated or even "cheated," owing to hidden charges, inconsistent quality, and service-related discrepancies. Due to the lack of proper differentiation, restaurant food pricing is often evaluated negatively in comparison with alternative online food delivery options or rival delivery services, further reinforcing customer dissatisfaction in this area. A conceptual model developed based on thematic and sentiment analyses presented in Figure 1.

Table 2. Analysis of Sentiment Distribution Within Themes (Source(s): Author's own creation/work).

Sentiment Category	Frequency of Value Dimensions (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)
Social Value	23.35	10.016	2.10	87.3
Epistemic Value	8.95	13.26	5.35	81.37
Emotional Value	88.9	18.09	1.744	80.16
Conditional Value	20.86	16.30	5.57	78.118
Functional Value	84.07	19.62	9.45	70.92
Quality Value	38.61	16.77	10.69	72.52

Another set of customer complaints focuses on the functionality and technical performance of applications. A considerable number of users reported problems such as frequent errors, crashes, and the overall slowness of the app, which hindered smooth usage. Difficulties associated with login and verification processes, particularly OTP-related issues, have also been highlighted as a major source of frustration. Furthermore, concerns regarding accessibility and usability, including challenges in navigating the interface and limited ease of use, have been frequently noted. In addition, several reviews point to persistent bugs and technical errors, all of which collectively contribute to a negative perception of the platform's functional value. The thematic and sentiment analyses provide an overall understanding of why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies.

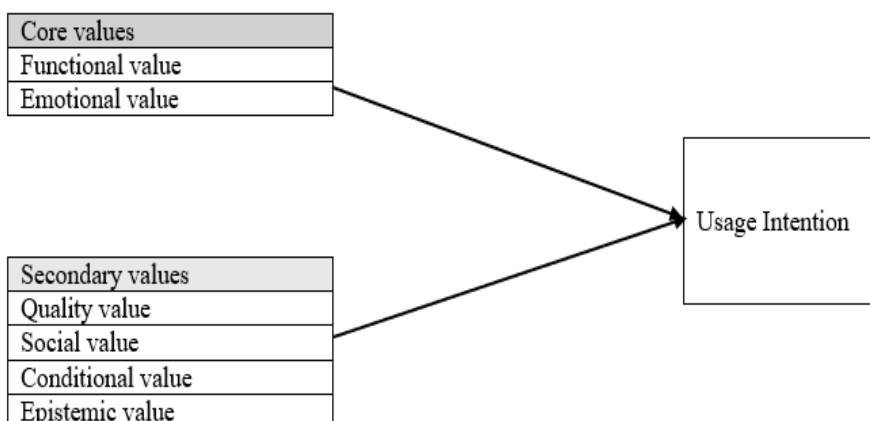


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5. Implications

This qualitative research method enhanced the outcome and concretised the rigour of addressing why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies. The inability of HFPs to deliver consumption values in accordance with consumers' priorities and preferences is the primary reason for their nascent stage. This study contributes to the literature by extending the knowledge of platform-based food consumption on a homemade food platform.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of why online food delivery platforms for homemade foods remain nascent in emerging economies. The study highlighted that functional value is a necessary condition or a must-have condition. This suggests that neglecting these aspects carries tangible reputational and operational risks. The high frequency indicates that a homemade food platform should primarily prioritise functional value, such as price, food taste, and service quality, as these dimensions form the core expectations of most users. The sentiment distribution across themes presented in Table 2, which indicates that 19.62% of user-generated reviews expressed negative sentiment, highlighting the need for systematic improvements in these areas.

Furthermore, epistemic values such as unique or novel experiences and chemical-free food, are required to meet user expectations, but further enhancements are unlikely to significantly increase usage intention. Therefore, excessive investment is unnecessary to improve epistemic value. This implies that startups should not overinvest in pushing epistemic value to the extremes, as excessive investment to include highly unique recipes and prove health claims may not translate proportionally into higher user engagement. Epistemic value can be treated as a must-have; it can enhance perceived novelty and differentiation but is not the core driver of usage intention. Epistemic value shows the lower frequency of value dimensions in sentiment analysis (see Table 2). Therefore, attention to enhancing functional value is not required to enhance its epistemic value.

Additionally, emotional values such as enjoyment, relaxation, and pleasure are core drivers of usage intention and performance features. HFPs can design or redesign their platform business models to ensure that users receive maximum emotional value with minimal investment, thereby supporting cost-efficient and sustainable operations. For example, platforms can design their websites or application interfaces to create emotional resonance with users and further integrate physical touchpoints to provide a homely experience that enhances emotional attachment.

Furthermore, quality values, such as consumer perceptions that a homemade food platform provides good-quality, hygienic food and maintains quality standards; social value, such as a health-conscious consumer who will tend to choose a healthy homemade food platform because they might feel a social connection with the platform; and conditional values, such as consumers' interest in variety, can be treated as delighters, as they do not independently drive platform adoption; they significantly enhance trust, satisfaction, and continued usage once functional expectations are met.

6. Conclusions, Limitation and Future Research Direction

This study contributes to both theory and practice in the emerging context of homemade food platforms by addressing why online food delivery platforms for homemade food are still in the nascent stage in emerging economies. The research question is addressed using a mixed methods research design comprising thematic analysis of UGC (2351 online reviews) by applying a Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based topic modelling technique. This approach identified functional and epistemic values as essential conditions, emotional value as a performance indicator, and quality, social value, and conditional value as delighters among consumption values. Current platform offerings do not adequately fulfil consumers' most important functional value and fail to prioritize consumption values in line with their relative importance. This study provides valuable insights for aspiring entrepreneurs, researchers, and startups to explore homemade food platform ideas. Additionally, this study recommends developing or redesigning business models to optimize highly important functional values, such as price, food taste, staff behaviour, ease of use, and reliability, and maximize emotional value, such as enjoyment, relaxation, and pleasure.

The study has limitations. First, our study is purely from a consumer perspective. Future studies should focus on startup founders and homemade food providers to develop comprehensive growth pathways for HFPs. Furthermore, this study does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how consumption value priorities of HFPs. Future research can conduct comparative analyses homemade food delivery platform and restaurant food delivery platform. Such insights would help startups and practitioners differentiate business models and avoid replicating restaurant-based platform strategies with the homemade food sector, a practice observed during interactions with homemade food startup owners.

Author contributions

B.M Rijas: conceptualization, methodology, interpretation of the results, validation, and formal analysis, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing Dr.T. Radha Ramanan: Conceptualization, writing—review and editing, supervision. Dr. K. Muhammed Shafi: Conceptualization, writing—review and editing, supervision

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

The study involved user-generated review comments and anonymous user generated data, posing minimal risk to participants and involving no identifiable personal information, clinical interventions, or biological samples. The study complied with all relevant institutional and national guidelines for non-interventional human subjects' research with respect to its design, data collection, and data management protocols.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The original dataset contains the names of homemade food platforms/startups in the user-generated review comments. To protect participant privacy and maintain confidentiality, these data are not publicly available. An anonymized version of the dataset has been provided as part of the manuscript submission for editorial and peer-review purposes.

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